

The Three Amigos Part II – Revolution – Chapter 28 – The Big Brown Box

“You know Ron, I was reading that story of Fleataxi’s on the net and he had some pretty good ideas about little bugout kits,” Gary mentioned.

“Who is this Fleataxi character you’re always talking about?” Ron asked.

“He’s a lawyer,” Gary said, “Has a Law named after him.” Gary teased. “Problem is he has his characters going around murdering sweat pants.”

“What makes you think he’s a lawyer?” Ron asked, “Did he tell you he was a lawyer?”

“Nah, claims he’s disabled like we are,” Gary said.

“Well, if he’s disabled, maybe he is qualified to be a lawyer,” Clarence observed.

“Fleataxi is ok fellas, he killed Geraldo in his story, too,” Gary insisted. “But I don’t remember the range.”

600-yards?

If you’ve ever spent a lot of time around 3 long-term close friends, you’ve probably noticed that they have their own form of confidential communications. We’ve all heard of body language and other forms of unspoken communications, but with guys like The Three Amigos it goes further. It is sort of like being inside of each other’s head. ‘Fools rush in’ might be an example. Now, if Gar-Bear wanted to say something to Ron in front of someone else, he might drop a song title. Like ‘fools rush in’ for example. Back in the Tony days, Gary and Ron had polished the technique to a fine art. Tony never had a clue what they were saying about him right in front of him. Were Gar-Bear to say, ‘fools rush in’ Ron would just run the lyric of the song through his head until he got the message. And, when you’re talking about 3 recovering drunks, you’ve managed to add an additional dimension. For all of their differences, drunks have a lot of common experiences. Recovering drunks have even more because there is a rhythm to recovery. Del Taco. (Been there, done that) You get the idea, I hope.

The Citadel was turning into a project where The Three Amigos needed to communicate in code half the time. It was one thing to go to these doctors of theirs for years for medical treatment, but it was a far different thing to actually work around them. Dr. J was a good example. Medical students where Dr. J attended school (In England) got exactly 4 hours of direct education on alcoholism. Of course, doctors spend a lot of time keeping up with their profession, but it is an entirely different experience for the doctor to be educated about alcoholism by a recovering alcoholic who took time to become a certified alcoholism and drug counselor like Gar-Bear. But, unless the doctor was an alcoholic him or herself, the doctor frequently lacked the insight that the drunk had about his own disease. In 1956 the AMA declared that alcoholism was a disease. Around 1973, if memory serves, they refined the definition. But there you go; it was mostly all clinical

stuff. It's the old 'you had to be there to understand' thing.

In this particular case, Gary educated Dr. J about alcoholism and Dr. J took time to explain medical things to Gary. You would have had to be there back about 1991 and seen Dr. J's face when Gary told him that he was an alcoholic. Dr. J actually argued with him for a minute or two. And then, he considered some of Gary's medical conditions and realized that he'd missed the obvious. Now he understood the hypertension, elevated triglycerides, acceptable cholesterol level, chronic pancreatitis, etc. One of the things that Gary got from the doc was insight about his own body and how it functioned. Fair trade. One of the best treatments for diabetes is an active lifestyle. This also serves to raise one's high-density lipoproteins and with a proper diet the patient has a lower cardiac risk ratio. The cardiac risk ratio is the ratio of low-density lipoproteins to high-density lipoproteins. The higher the ratio, the higher the risk for cardiac related illness.

In Gary's case, his LDL's were always in the acceptable range. However, due to his sedentary lifestyle, his HDL's tended to be low, e.g. 20-25. The neuropathy was severe enough to preclude the active lifestyle so Gary used plan B and improved his HDL's through diet. That behavior plus walking the dog 4 blocks every other day was the best he could do. His CRR was 3.6 and according to the scale used by the lab Gary used was 0.2 BELOW the minimum acceptable level. And, lower is better. Gary figured he'd live forever unless he actually got sick enough he had to go to a hospital. (It's currently 2.2 as a ratio of total Cholesterol to HDLP and the HDLP are greater than the LDLP, 50 v 47. Triglycerides are a bare 67. Yea... I'm going to live forever...)

In terms of the backup equipment installation in the lowest basement level of the Citadel, the guys had provided for backup water and opted to go with a propane based system for the generators. Diesel generators might be a great choice, but that would have forced them to go with electrically energized cooking systems. In the end, they purchased several used large volume (30,000 gallon) underground propane tanks and went with generators that could be operated via the Palmdale natural gas utility and by propane if they lost natural gas. The sewage system was also tied into the Palmdale system with a large backup septic system. Both Cummings Power and Generac could supply modular generation systems and the amigos left the choice of equipment up to the mechanical engineer. But, even a backup generator requires time to kick in, so they went with true uninterruptible power units for all critical systems. In a true UPS, all of the electricity is inverted battery power and the only limitation on run time was the size of the batteries used. The unit is essentially a large battery, an inverter and a battery charger.

The guys were a trifle short on designing hospital systems, but they certainly had ideas about the capacities they wanted for their system. They wanted pure, disease free air, lighting that was the closest thing possible to natural sunlight and a 'warm' building. The warmth (not heat, but emotional warmth) was necessary, in their opinion, to avoiding a depressing atmosphere. So, despite the inevitable 'discussions' with the doctors over equipment issues, they skipped the Cadillac and went right for the Lamborghini. The ground level floor of the building was equipped with what amounted to airlocks. Trip

beams opened the outer doors via computer control and only when the outer door was sealed did the computer signal the inner doors to open. Had they built such a system back in the days that Star Trek had been on TV originally, you would have agreed with Clarence's assertion that the building was the Starship Enterprise.

Interestingly, with the initiation of the Citadel construction, Lancaster Community Hospital began construction of their new Palmdale Hospital on 40th East and Palmdale Boulevard. Why is life always a case of feast or famine? In truth, the construction of the Citadel made it possible for the second hospital to be built because the new Palmdale Hospital could refer all Medicare and MediCal patients to the Citadel and actually have a profitable operation. Stranger still was the fact that the Citadel was better equipped in terms of medical equipment, as in the case of the ultrasound equipped CT scanner and both open and closed MRIs. And while the new Palmdale Hospital had a quality laboratory, the Citadel's lab was the best in the area.

The only thing that Palmdale Hospital had over on the Citadel was bed count, with 125% of the number of beds provided by the Citadel. In terms of building construction, the Palmdale Hospital met current hospital construction standards. It was rated for an 8.0 earthquake but sheathed in aluminum alloy and glass. And, for the doctors, they had the best of both worlds. The Citadel paid them a reasonable living, gave them great tax write-offs and the 'charity' work. The Palmdale Hospital let them charge (gouge) their patients as much as they wanted.

The 3rd basement of the Citadel attempted to maintain a 6-months inventory of everything plus the extra equipment needed in the event the facility was turned into a shelter/hospital. Even as construction continued on the 3 above ground stories of the Citadel, the shelter storage area was being fully supplied. Back to the subject of hospital beds for a moment; ever price one? They have MSRP ranging from \$5,000 to \$12,000. Ever price one of those IVAC electronic thermometers? They have an MSRP of \$495.

No damned wonder it cost so much to stay in a hospital. Every bed needed a patient monitoring system, oxygen, vacuum and the inevitable TV, usually one that couldn't be made to work. Add a chair or two for visitors and that 'bed' cost about \$25,000. The latest trend was to have monitors that checked blood pressure, pulse, oxygen saturation and heaven knows what else. Then, there was the equipment like the IVAC thermometer, portable BP units, pill cabinets and all of that nursing 'stuff'. IVAC sold the thermometer covers in 10,000 unit cases for a measly \$250. Now, in the 'good old days' a patient usually got a tub, toothbrush, comb, toothpaste, Kleenex, and maybe even a Bic razor. No more, folks, sorry. These things were only provided to patients on an as needed basis. And then, there were the drugs. \$4 for a Tylenol? Ouch! Of course the BP cuffs that hooked up to the patient monitor were DISPOSABLE.

All in all, \$25,000 per bed wasn't where the real costs lay anyway. Hospitals used gloves and Foley's and disposable syringes by the case on a daily basis. And administering an IV required an infusion monitor, etc., etc., etc. Hell, maybe even a couple multiple infusion devices. And that bar they put on beds to help some patients pull them-

selves up? \$1,200 for the cheap one. It was probably just a matter of time before hospitals went to disposable bedding if they hadn't done so already. The Three Amigos let the doctors choose the medical equipment, but when it came to the 'bed' it was Lamborghini time. MSRP per bed worked out to a neat \$50k. Then the negotiations for the best prices began. Final delivered cost per 'bed' came in around \$30k. These were the 4 bed wards. Certain rooms were private rooms as in the case of ICU, CCU and isolation areas.

And, in the year of our Lord 2007, everything in the hospital was computerized. When Gar-Bear had been in the hospital for his 'cold', he'd spent 3-4 days in CCU in an induced coma, 2 more in a private room and the last 48 hours in a 3-bed ward. 95% of the 'stuff' they'd used was plastic and disposable, but probably cost like it had been made from stainless steel. The only good thing our pal had done when he'd left the hospital was to not steal the towels like the guy in the next bed had. Always heard about towel thieves, but had never met one before. It was probably a good thing the guy's sheets weren't clean or he'd have taken them too. The really ironic thing was that the guy had been in the hospital for surgery to repair a herniated disc. They had him on a morphine drip for the pain, but because he was going to be discharged, discontinued the drip. His BP was borderline high anyway and when they took his BP to discharge him, it was something like 190 over 110. They couldn't let him go in that condition but had no orders for BP medicine. Of course this is the famous Catch-22. No morphine because he's being discharged, no discharge because the pain is raising his BP and no other options. Of course all of this is agitating the guy, raising his blood pressure even more.

And, for lunch, the guy insisted on having soy sauce for his chow mien. Fortunately, the hospital didn't have any soy sauce or the guy would probably still be in. It got so bad, Gary had some nameless individual sneak in a couple of Xanax so he could get the guy chilled out and gone. Well, moments before Gary got hooked up in anything totally questionable, the doctor ordered 3mg of morphine IV and the guy's blood pressure dropped like a rock. Now, the guy is dressed and ready to bolt and the doctor also orders 0.25mg of Xanax for the guy to be administered orally in front of the nurse. The guy had driven himself to the hospital for the surgery and intended to drive himself home. But the nurses said he couldn't drive and insisted on calling him a taxi and the guy was broke. Can't tell you how it worked out, but Gary never saw the guy again. Hey, I don't make this stuff up folks; I just take good notes. Like I told someone, always take a Xanax tablet with you when you go to the hospital, it's your 'Get out of Jail Free' card. (That's an opinion, not medical advice!)

The Citadel was turning into a fun project for The Three Amigos. They were getting to build a dream bomb shelter with a really good medical facility, all on the other guy's money. And most everything was new and shiny and expensive. Old Gar-Bear was in hog heaven when it came to all of those computers, too. He was in favor of putting in a screen, keyboard and mouse for every bed to allow the patients to surf the web. They ran that by the Foundation and it was a go as long as the Foundation could supply used computers equipped with Microsoft wireless keyboards and mice and running Windows software. Yeah, yeah, I know, but what the hell, the Foundation could get a really good

price on the Microsoft products.

The UN was almost totally gone and the US was pushing to finish rebuilding from the 11/12/05 attacks. Somewhere along the line, Washington had 'gotten religion' and was actually responding to needs of the country. In Iowa they say make hay while the sun shines and the US was on the move. All of that money in the economy finally fueled it sufficiently to allow for a bit of an economic recovery too. This was truly a good thing, because the Republicans were looking at a trillion dollar deficit and needed the revenues the recovery would bring. From all outward appearances, the war on terror was over, too. Yeah, from all outward appearances.

Maybe God figured that the US had gotten a big enough break, who knows, but it was hurricane season again and they were lining up in the eastern Atlantic like they had back in 2004. And the Gulf Stream really was slowing down. Anyone checked the sky lately looking for rocks? Did you ever stop and think about what a challenge it is just to live in the US? In the north you have bitter winters and in the east you have hurricanes. In the Midwest, you have tornados and on the west coast you have earthquakes and those Pacific winter storms. Add the drought, El Nino, La Nina, the Santa Ana winds, forest fires and you have a real challenge. And Kalifornia couldn't seem to generate enough electricity in the summer and the lights periodically browned or blacked out. I sure hope that bite of apple was worth it! The Citadel was being wrapped up, as a building, and was looking forward to a September 1, 2007 opening date.

"Man, Cheyenne Mountain ain't got nothing on this place," Clarence observed as The Three Amigos toured the new building.

"I was thinking it might be nice to live here," Gary said.

"Why?" Ron retorted. "You said living in a building like this was just naturally depressing."

"I did say that, didn't I?" Gary laughed. "Well, you know me. I'm always depressed anyway so it seems sort of like a natural thing to do. On the other hand, I'd have direct access to a T-3 line."

"What's a T-3 line?" Clarence asked.

"Broadband with an attitude," Gary replied.

"It sort of makes sense for Gar-Bear to make the move Clarence," Ron observed. "He spends all of his time in front of his computer or sleeping anyway."

"What he needs to be doing is taking Missy for a walk and getting some exercise," Clarence said. "Then something like the common cold wouldn't put him in a hospital for 8 days."

“I don’t think we have to worry about me going to the hospital anymore, Clarence,” Gary observed dryly, “I think I’ve been blacklisted.”

“Man, that’s no good,” Clarence said. “What are you going to do if you get another cold?”

“I think I’ll try Vitamin C next time,” Gary laughed. “Hell, I was unconscious most of the time anyway and missed all of the fun. Besides, I caught one of the nurses writing ‘DNR’ on my chart.”

The Three Amigos Part II – Revolution – Chapter 29 – A man's got to know his limitations

“Not to change the subject,” Clarence said to indicate that he was, “But something is missing on this project of ours.”

“What's that pal?” Gary asked.

“Well, if I knew, I'd tell you,” Clarence said, “But I don't know what it is. Every time I look at the roof, though, I get the idea we've overlooked something.”

“I don't know what it could be,” Ron commented. “We put a second steel plate roof over the elevator equipment and such to protect them. All there is up there to see is 160,000 square feet of rusting steel. The roof will be the first thing to rust, too with the sun beating down on it like that.”

“That's it,” Clarence said, “We're letting all of that sunshine go to waste.”

“What do you mean?” Ron asked.

“Can't we put those panel things on the roof to generate electricity?” Clarence asked.

“Quick, get the snakebite kit,” Gary chuckled. “Of course, Clarence. If it had been a snake we'd have gotten bitten. And if we tilted the panels at about 45 degrees, it would give us about 320,000 square feet of solar panels. I was reading about a solar panel that puts out 165 watts per 12.5 square feet. That means that we could generate 320,000 divided by 12.5 times 165 or 4,224,000 watts from the roof. You earned your keep today partner.”

“That's great for when the sun shines,” Ron said, “But what about at night?”

“Remember that great big gel cell battery that our old IP had I was telling you about?” Gary asked. “We could put in a bank of those and store one hell of a lot of energy. Man, we'd be so redundant that we might never need to fire up the standby generators.”

If you missed that in 'The Ark', the gel cell was 48"x48"x84" tall. It could store enough electricity to power the IP's entire operation for 4 hours and this guy used a lot of energy. Gary was on the phone to the Foundation in a New York minute. Free was good they said, but how much was 'free' going to cost them? It would all fit nicely within the budget they were told and Gar-Bear was given the go-ahead. But then Gar got to thinking about that 60' high 400' long southern wall. If he used the top 50', he could pick up another 20,000 square feet and generate another 264kw, giving them almost 4.5 megawatts. And, the beauty of the entire thing was that they didn't need to rush the solar project to completion. So, Gary gave the engineer the go-ahead, in turn, to find a contractor and get the system installed.

“You know fellas, I think I’m going to take a break from writing for a while,” Gary said.

“Why’s that Gar-Bear? Running out of people to offend?” Ron chuckled.

“Not really. I’ve bad-mouthed Blacks, Méxicans, Muslims, Jews and Christians. Been known to be a little harsh on Republicans and Democrats,” Gary replied. “Hell, I’ve managed to say something bad about just about every nationality there is, including the US Marine Corps. But, it’s like Harry Callahan said in ‘Magnum Force’, ‘A man’s got to know his limitations’.”

“How did you ever get started writing in the first place?” Clarence asked.

“Well, I got to reading *Lights Out* and *Pax Americana* and then *Battle of Jakes*,” Gary replied. “Ended up reading every story I could find on Frugal’s website. Just thought I’d toss in my 2 cents worth on the subject of being prepared.”

“Did it do any good?” Ron asked.

“Don’t rightly know, partner,” Gary replied, “If I managed to get one guy in Florida to buy a pack of flashlight batteries then I did a good thing. Besides, I’m so darned busy writing that I have to stay up nights just to get any reading done. And like Fleataxi and I were discussing, when you get writer’s block it stops being fun.”

“I’d think twice about quitting writing if I were you,” Clarence urged.

“I can’t come up with any more ideas Clarence,” Gary shook his head.

“What have you done so far?” Clarence pressed.

“A half dozen terrorist attacks, an abrupt weather change, my version of Deep Impact,” Gary explained. “You know; the usual TSHTF stuff. I’ve invaded the US by everyone who is capable of such a thing and even a couple of countries that would have to have big ones to try.”

“Tried an earthquake?” Clarence suggested.

“Called it ‘The Big One’,” Gary replied. “Even had a bunch of white racists in one of my stories. I mean hell fellas, how many times can you tell the same story?”

“I don’t know, but they attacked the World Trade Center twice and the Pentagon,” Ron pointed out, “And that was after they’d blown up the Embassies in Africa and the Marine Corps barracks in Lebanon.”

“Yeah Gary, you’re looking at this disaster thing all wrong,” Clarence agreed with Ron. “How many school shootings have there been in the US?”

“Too many,” Gary scowled. “The thing is that I have to concentrate on large scale disasters to make my point. It’s not about people killing people for me. Hell, I don’t write such hot action sequences anyway. Of course several of the stories include a lot of deaths because they’re some variation on a war theme, but that’s not what I’m into. It’s like the Citadel. The place is a hospital with extras.”

“Man, I’ll say extras,” Ron laughed. “That place we put together is the best equipped hospital I’ve ever seen. And like Clarence said, the survivability of the place just about beats out Cheyenne Mountain. I’d bet that we could house the entire population of Palmdale in the place if something big happened.”

“That was the idea, you idiot,” Gary laughed. “After spending 343 hours in that little shelter in my backyard, I had claustrophobia worse than ever.”

“Speaking of that shelter of yours,” Ron responded, “You going to keep it now that the Citadel is almost finished?”

“Yeah, I’m not from Florida. I don’t throw the plywood away after the hurricane,” Gary said.

“You never throw anything away,” Ron said, “That’s why you can’t park your car in your garage.”

“That’s not fair partner, that’s all perfectly good stuff that I just don’t happen to be using at the moment.”

“How many MagLites do you have in your garage?” Ron asked.

“Three.”

“Go get me one, I want to see it,” Ron insisted.

“I don’t know where in the garage they are, Ron.”

“I think it’s about time we cleaned out your garage Gar-Bear,” Ron laughed, “How long has it been since you’ve seen the MagLites?”

“Four years.”

“Well when we do find them, we’ll probably have to throw them away due to battery corrosion,” Ron shook his head.

“I had all of my stuff organized until I came back home,” Gary retorted. “Then everyone started moving stuff around and I sort of lost track of it.”

“So what you’re telling me is that you might have 3 corroded MagLites, either in the gar-

age or in the shed, right?" Ron started to get serious.

"Unless someone took them, yes," Gary responded ruefully.

"You ever heard of something called a garage sale, Gary?" Clarence asked.

"Had a couple of them Clarence," Gary explained, "I think that's when I began to lose track of my stuff."

"Look partner, I think this situation is beyond redemption," Ron groaned. "You got all of the medical stuff organized pretty good so why don't you go buy some new MagLites and batteries and start organizing your emergency supplies the same way? You can empty out that office supply cabinet in the Office and put all of your medical and emergency stuff in the cabinet and keep it locked."

"Won't do me any good locked in a cabinet," Gary insisted.

"Won't do you any good if you can't find it when you need it either," Ron snapped.

"We have all of that stuff in the shelter Ronald, so why bother?" Gary asked. "Besides, I've definitely decided to move to the Citadel."

"When did you decide that?" Ron asked.

"About the time you started wanting to see my MagLites!"

Aside from the shelter, Gary and Sharon had a ton of survival gear, somewhere. True, they had done a pretty good job of cleaning out the garage when they had started moving stuff into the shelter, but all of those empty holes in the garage were begging for something to be stuffed into them and it hadn't taken long for the garage to get right back into its original condition. Ron did have a point though and Gary decided that starting the next day he was going to make the first pass at clearing a path. Right before or after he mowed the lawn, which he intended to do right before or after he walked Missy. Sharon and he had spent a whole week there in 2003 and they managed to clear half the floor. Then Amy moved in and when they finally left, the garage was still full. The only way to keep their garage empty was to not use it in the first place.

"Say Ron, did I tell you my brother-in-law died?" Gary asked.

"Yeah, happened when you were in the hospital right?" Ron replied.

"Nope, he died Friday, when they signed the death certificate," Gary said. "Had DVT (Deep Vein Thrombosis) and popped a clot. Cause of death was a pulmonary embolism. The ironic thing was that according to the pathologist, he might not have had Parkinson's Disease, but they won't know until they get the test results back."

"I think that's why they call it the practice of medicine," Ron replied.

"Could be, partner, but I sure wish they'd find someone besides the 3 of us to practice on," Gary observed. "I've got to start taking Vitamin C."

"How are you doing on getting your blood sugar down?" Ron asked.

"Sharon just told me today that the Prednisone forces the blood sugar to stay high according to the nurses at the hospital," Gary announced.

"Lovely, you're taking a drug that you don't want to take and that's forcing you to take a drug you can't afford and it is screwing up you blood sugar, right?" Ron asked.

"Right, but I've only been on the stuff for less than 2 weeks, so I'm going to cut from 2 pills a day to 1 pill a day and then cut it out altogether, near the end of the week," Gary explained. "I'll get Dr. J to prescribe something more appropriate than that dang steroid to handle my asthma. Besides, I'm using the Nebulizer and the Albuterol QID/PRN."

"Do you think that's wise?" Clarence asked.

"Yes, I had my blood sugar under perfect control, I just didn't respond properly when I caught that cold," Gary responded. "Besides, I have always had a weight control problem and I'll be flipped if I'm going to take some drug that screws up my blood sugar, makes me gain weight and po's me in general. Dr. J has been shocked at how well Sharon and I have been maintaining my health in light of the insulin dependency. And, if that isn't bad enough, he has me on that 500mg Levaquin antibiotic and I've had to start taking Difulcan to counteract the effect of the Levaquin."

"Really? What do they use Difulcan to treat?" Ron asked.

"Ask Linda, I'm not saying another word," Gary laughed. "But, I checked the label on the Prednisone and he didn't give me any refills anyway so I just get off it now before I have to go through a long-term supervised withdrawal from the drug. That's the other problem with Prednisone partner, if you're on it several weeks you can't just stop it cold. But, I pulled the PM dosages from my caddy and will take 10mg each morning through the end of the week. You gotta watch 'em, like a hawk."

"So you know more than the doctor, right?" Ron said.

"I don't have his fancy education, but I can read and he isn't the only doctor in the state of Kalifornia," Gary said. "You know that I always discuss decisions like this with Dr. J anyway. People should never put stuff in their body without finding out what they're taking. Sharon is allergic to Penicillin and Sulfa and they gave her an Rx one time that when I looked it up on the net before we filled it found out it contained both. I'm sure glad it wasn't me on the other end of the phone line during her follow-up call to the doctor."

“Gary, I can see your new storyline as plain as day,” Clarence asked.

“What might that be, partner?” Gary asked.

“How the doctors have a secret conspiracy to kill off everyone,” Clarence laughed.

The Three Amigos Part II – Revolution – Chapter 30 – The Great Medical Conspiracy

Clarence was right in a way, although Gary was pretty certain that there wasn't any conspiracy. The doctors couldn't want to kill off their patients because those patients were their bread and butter. Gary had lost faith in the medical system in 1997 when through a purely irrational act he'd ingested an excessive quantity of Tylenol. The triage nurse had left him sitting in the ER waiting room for hours despite being made fully aware of the medical circumstances. And he'd been paying for that moment of lunacy ever since. It had triggered a rapid onset of the diabetic neuropathy and was a bill he'd be paying the rest of his life. And physicians were complaining about the high cost of malpractice insurance. Insurance rates are based on insurance companies' experiences so if the rates were high, that meant that they'd been paying lots of claims. Part of that was no doubt a fault of the legal profession, but surely some of the claims must have been founded in fact. In recent years, doctors had been forced to make excessive tests to avoid possible malpractice claims, forcing the price of healthcare up. This had forced up the health insurance premiums and had without doubt resulted in reduced health insurance coverage's.

Gary's decision to stop the Prednisone was logical and probably quite rational in the circumstances. It didn't matter to him one bit that his 2 amigos thought his decision rash. Moreover, he'd call Dr. J the next day and get an appointment, even if it meant that he had to do a walk-in and wait for a while. In the meantime, he'd use the Albuterol and ½ the prescribed dosage of Prednisone. This attitude had been a hard won lesson relating to when he'd stopped drinking. Alcohol is a sedative hypnotic drug by classification. That category of drugs also included barbiturates, benzodiazepines and a miscellaneous category that included Meprobamate and Quaaludes. Anyway, as with most drunks, Gary had sleep problems when he'd discontinued his primary sedative, alcohol. By chance, the doctor had prescribed Xanax for Gary and it became his new sedative. Most pharmacists would agree with the assertion than Xanax was nothing more than 'freeze-dried alcohol'.

Like every drug, there were associated risks in its use. Xanax was highly addictive, a known side effect of benzodiazepines. And once you started using Xanax as a sleep aide, you played hell sleeping without it. However, if one strictly followed a protocol pertaining to the usage of Xanax, the 'addiction' could be kept in check. Nevertheless, it was like doing a juggling act using 3-lit sticks of dynamite. Gary had switched from Xanax to Benadryl in an effort for eliminate the drug usage, but it hadn't worked out. One of the side effects of Benadryl was that it produced drowsiness. In fact a high percentage of the over-the-counter sleep preparations were nothing more than Benadryl.

Xanax was cheap, about 10 cents a tablet for 0.5mg generic tablets. Non-prescription Benadryl was available in 50mg capsules for 5 cents each. But, after 3-4 weeks of usage, the body usually overcame the sedative effects of Benadryl, leaving you right where you started. Gary had taken Allegra for years for his allergies, but it was also expensive and he lacked insurance. Using Benadryl helped with his allergy problems

cheaply and effectively, but it didn't make him sleepy. Thus, Gary had ended up back on 0.5mg of Xanax QPM for sleep. He'd managed to talk his doctor into the prescription to help him get off of Vicodin ES, which he began taking after his cancer surgery for pain and the added side effect of drowsiness. His Rx was for 0.5mg of Xanax TID even though he only used 0.5mg QPM. At last count, he'd saved up quite a few leftover Xanax.

Vicodin ES is 750mg of Tylenol plus 7.5mg of Hydrocodone, a synthetic form of Codeine. Opium produces two drugs, morphine and codeine. The natural forms of the drugs were far safer than the synthetics, but you took what you could get. Now, long-term opiate use produced a drying effect on the intestinal tract and the body adjusted to the usage by adding moisture to overcome the drying effect. Cessation of opiate use required the body to readjust the moisture in the intestinal tract, so the natural side effect of getting off opiates was diarrhea.

There is nothing really simple about using any drugs. Even long-term usage of aspirin had its downside, irritation of the stomach. By the way, Demerol, the synthetic form of Morphine, was falling into great disfavor. It wasn't as effective as Morphine and the medical profession had learned that you sometimes ended up killing a patient trying to stop his or her pain. One other piece of medical trivia that might interest you is the coding some drugs carry. A drug labeled LD50 indicated is followed by a number giving the dosage where 50% of the people taking it die. The maximum daily dose for Tylenol is 4,000mg, 8 500 mg tablets, and the LD50 was 7,000mg or 14 500mg tablets. The liver processes Tylenol and an overdose clogs the liver producing death.

Before his cold put Gary in the hospital he was managing to get by on 3 pills in the morning and 6 pills at night. But after his hospital stay, Gary's pill caddy was barely large enough to hold all the junk they had him on. It was ironic that when Gary had been forced to go to physician's samples after he lost his insurance coverage how many fewer drugs he'd needed. He went from 21/day to 9/day and that included the aspirin tablet. It seemed perfectly logical and rational to Gary, therefore, to eliminate as many of the new drugs as possible. As far as Gary was concerned, the doctors were out to get him, confirming his suspicions that they belonged on his enemies list.

Richard Nixon had made the use of enemy lists popular back during his Presidency. Poor Dick had done a Martha Stewart and lied. Didn't people like Dick and Martha realize that the best response to questions like those that had gotten them all into trouble was to take the 5th Amendment? Maybe Martha used insider knowledge and maybe she didn't. Who cares? But, instead of getting a good criminal attorney, she went with corporate lawyers and shaded the truth. She was convicted of lying to the feds, not for insider trading. You sort of have to give old Al Capone credit; all they ever got him on was tax evasion. And as good as Nixon was, yes, some of us liked him, old Dick didn't have the brains to say yeah we did it, so what? He had a criminal attorney by the name of Mitchell. Or should that be phrased that he had an attorney criminal? By the way, are John Mitchell and John Ashcroft related? Sometimes I wonder about things like that.

Personally if I ever got into trouble, I'd hire Jerry Spence and Johnny Cochran and take the 5th. Hell, maybe even 2 fifth's if it got bad enough. Johnny could always argue that it was a racially motivated case because two of my grandchildren are of mixed race and Spence ought to be able to get anyone off. Even Alan Dershowitz thought Martha got a raw deal and you know how liberal that guy is. Maybe I'll have to swap the positions of the bottom of the ocean between the lawyers and the doctors. Do you know what you call 750 lawyers on the bottom of the ocean? A GOOD start!

September 1, 2007...

With much fanfare and ado, the Citadel was open for business. There was a lot of resentment over the fact that the hospital outclassed the new Palmdale Hospital, and that other than rendering lifesaving immediate aid, the Citadel would not treat anyone not on Medicare or MediCal. Ambulance drivers were now required to ask if the patient had insurance and if the answer was yes, they went to Palmdale Hospital. All of the no folks went to the Citadel. I suspect that all sorts of folks began dropping their group coverage at the next open enrollment period, but have nothing to back that up.

They managed to locate some of those submarine batteries made in Germany by Exide and the contractor made a bit of an extra effort to complete the solar project by opening day. He actually succeeded in getting the 340,000 square feet of solar panels installed, but the subbasement wiring was incomplete. I recall mentioning that the building had a 1.5" weathering steel covering but believe that I failed to mention that those concrete walls were 6' thick. And to avoid that closed in feeling, the outside walls of the building were all painted with murals like those you see in restaurants with fake windows.

Gary and Sharon left everything sitting except for their clothes, personal items and the 'small' gun collection. They took a small apartment on the lowest basement level and Gar-Bear made sure that he could access the T-3 line through the hospital's network. Their new apartment was 'comfortable', e.g., small enough that it didn't require much cleaning. They sprung for a new King sized adjustable bed with one of those Swedish Tempur-pedic mattresses. Gary sprung for a new 6 GHz Dell computer with a serial Raid array consisting of 6 of the 1,000 Gb HDD's and the 10/100/1000 port. He really didn't much care for the new Windows operating systems, but if the truth were known, Gary still liked DOS. Since they intended to take their meals at the hospital cafeteria, they opted for a 60" stove, refrigerator, microwave and sink appliance. Sharon's quilting room was about the size of the master bedroom and Gary's office was just big enough for a huge gun safe, the computer and his printers and the office supply cabinet. I sort of wonder if that claustrophobia bit of Gary's was all about getting out of the restraints, because that cramped little office suited him just fine.

And since the apartment was not considered public space, Gary sort of ignored the law about smoking in public buildings. He just put in one of the Sharper Image ionic air cleaners to catch the smoke before it hit a smoke detector. Heaven is a 6 GHz 64 bit processor with onboard memory and with 8Gb of ultra-high speed ram, a T-3 connection and Microsoft Office 10. Derek and Mary were stuck with the job of cleaning out the

garage and shed. Rumor has it that they found 4 corroded MagLites and all of Gary's extra gun stuff. Now about this smoking thing; the respiratory therapist suggested, off the record that since Gary had been smoking for 46.5 years that he couldn't do much more damage. She suggested he cut down to ½ a pack a day and enjoy his few remaining days. It worked for him, but living in the hospital subbasement put him awfully close to all of those medical people. Dr. J had to increase Gary's antidepressant drug dosage.

Getting off the Prednisone and eating the 'healthy' food prepared in the hospital cafeteria did the trick for regulating his blood sugar. And, along the way, Gary made an interesting discovery. On the days that he kept his smoking to a bare minimum he suffered from low blood pressure with readings of 100/45 not being uncommon. They could only manage to sneak in Missy and three of the cats, however. To avoid trouble over having a dog in the hospital subbasement apartment, Gar-Bear bought a Seeing Eye dog harness with an extra-long handle and a white cane. Everyone was amazed to see a guy Gary's size with such a small Seeing Eye dog. Unfortunately for Gary, Missy wasn't confused about going for walks and she dang well knew the difference between walking around the Citadel and around the 3rd subbasement. They solved the floor-wetting problem by getting the 11-year-old puppy trained to use a cat litter pan. Life was good and getting better.

2007 Hurricane Names:

Andrea, Barry, Chantal, Dean, Erin, Felix, Gabrielle, Humberto, Ingrid, Jerry, Karen, Lorenzo, Melissa, Noel, Olga, Pablo, Rebekah, Sebastien, Tanya, Van, Wendy

There are six lists of storm names that are recycled. And, for each of the earth's storm areas, there is a separate list. The 2004 names will be used again in 2011 unless one or more of the names are retired. It would seem likely that Charley, Frances, and Ivan are good candidates for retirement. Significant storms have their names retired and the world organization responsible for maintaining the lists has multiple criteria for defining a significant storm. Andrew has been retired for example. Can't say that I'm going anywhere with this, but found it to be interesting.

Anyway, life was good and getting better. Damon and Derek stayed on as much because they had nowhere to go as for any other reason. Gary and Sharon gave Derek and Mary the house and what little equity that they had in it. Damon got an apartment for himself and the kids and everyone was back in their homes trying to readjust to untroubled times. Linda and her sister's office building had come through ok and they had a nice income stream again. And The Three Amigos took payment for their services in kind in an effort to hide the income. It didn't hurt any that Gary was a retired tax auditor. Tax agencies set a thief to catch a thief and it usually boils down to which of the individuals is the cleverest. Gary had a pretty impressive record on some of his cases having even taken on a Fortune 100 corporation at one time for fraud. Needless to say, the amigos probably wouldn't have too many tax problems.

The hospital cafeteria meals were part of Gary's in-kind payment. Meals of this sort are usually considered income, but if there aren't any records, there must not be any meals,

right? And all Three Amigos and their family were considered to be family members of one or the other of the doctors and received gratis medical treatment and drugs. It all got back to the absence of records thing. How many doctors to you know who keep financial records of treatment they provide members of their immediately families? That many huh? I don't agree with that, the number is much lower and close to zero. And their families are the first ones to benefit from physician's samples, too. Now let's face it, you don't need much income when you don't have to buy anything but clothing, gas for your car, and the occasional carton of smokes, now do you? Sharon and Lucy were the only two who didn't smoke and the others weren't interested in quitting. And Medicare paid for all of their respiratory meds so they were home free. They were going to live until they died.

The Three Amigos Part II – Revolution – Chapter 31 – The News Conference

Antelope Valley Press, September 2, 2007 – Headline – Hospital or Bomb Shelter?

“The new hospital for the uninsured opened with much fanfare yesterday. The public was afforded an opportunity to inspect the facility although many of them will never be able to use it. The hospital only treats charity cases. That’s right, if you have insurance, they won’t treat you.

“The hospital, called The Citadel, is the best equipped, state-of-the-art medical facility this reporter has ever seen. It is also built like a bomb shelter. There are no windows and the two entrances to the facility are airlocks. Why do we need a bomb shelter in Palmdale?

“Apparently there are 3 aboveground floors and at least 2 below ground floors, but visitors were limited to a single below ground floor. The atmosphere is pleasant and from outward appearances, patients will receive the best of care.”

The reporter went on to describe the facility in some detail and harped on the bomb shelter angle. He also expressed rather strong negative opinions about the hospital not treating everyone in the community. It was the typical reporter stuff, trying to make a story out of nothing. Gary was more amused by the article than anything and he’d about half been expecting something like this to happen. He’d given a list of media contacts to a Secretary and requested that she contact everyone on the list to announce a news conference to be held at 4pm that day. All of the news networks and several newspapers were on the list. It would be a closed news conference with admission by invitation only.

“Gar-Bear, you see this article in the AV Press?” Ron roared into Gary’s home office holding the paper.

“Yeah. It’s about what I expected, partner. I called a news conference for 4pm,” Gary grinned.

“What did you do that for?” Ron scowled.

“I don’t know. I guess I just always wanted the chance to hold a news conference,” Gary chuckled.

“Are you nuts? Never mind, I know the answer to that one,” Ron replied. “I hope you enjoy your little party.”

“You’re going to be there and introduce yourself and Clarence, Ronald,” Gary said. “Then you can introduce me and watch the fireworks.”

“I don’t know if I like the sound of that,” Ron said, “You’d better watch yourself Gar-

Bear.”

“I’m going to watch the reporters, chief. You can watch me,” Gary was almost laughing.

4pm, The Citadel...

“Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Ron Green and I am a member of the board of this facility. The Gentleman to my left is Clarence Rawlings and he too is a member of the board. The Chairman of the Board is Gary Olsen, the gentleman to my right. Mr. Olsen will make a brief statement and then field a few questions.”

“My name is Gary Olsen and I’m going to outline the rules for this news conference before I begin. I am only going to answer each question one time. There will be no follow up questions, period. This organization has nothing to conceal and you may be surprised by my candor. Is the reporter who wrote this article in the AV Press here today?”

The reporter waived a limp wrist to indicate his presence.

“Would you stand up Sir?” Gary asked. The reporter hesitated and stood.

“I’d like to thank you Sir for this article,” Gary said holding the paper aloft. “I was only 5 years old in 1948 when Harry Truman held up the newspaper announcing that Dewey had won the election. I’ve always wanted the opportunity to do the same thing. You have made this possible and I’ll be eternally grateful to you. You can sit down now.

“Where were all of you on November 12, 2005?” Gary began. “I can tell you where I was; in a cramped little storm shelter designed to hold 6 people with 23 friends and relatives. And that’s where we stayed for the next 14 days. Although it proved later to have been unnecessary, at least the 24 of us were safe from any radioactive fallout.

“In the months that followed, this country went through a rough time, especially in its political leadership. But, most of you know how all of that worked out. Anyway, Ron and I both ended up sick about the same time a while back and somehow the B & M G Foundation heard about it. For whatever reason, the Foundation decided to enter into a new arena of public service. You will have to speak to the Foundation about that.

“The Foundation put up a significant sum of money to construct this facility. As those of you who toured the facility know,” Gary said glaring at the reporter from the AV Press, “This facility is state of the art. And yes, it is a bomb shelter. The building is wrapped in 1½” of weathering steel over 6’ thick reinforced concrete walls. There are two entrances, both airlocks. The building is maintained under constant positive pressure to prevent any foreign bodies from entering the building, as in the case of a clean room. The building’s artificial lighting is full spectrum florescent lighting using what some people call grow lights. The atmosphere within the building is highly filtered and exchanged at a rate exceeding 100% per hour. Our air purification and filtration systems use ultraviolet negative ionization and input filtration air purifiers. This system is supplemented with a

low-level ozone production system as required. The air in the building is more pure than the outside air.

“The Citadel has 6 floors, 3 above and 3 below ground. The lowest level is dedicated to the typical equipment one would find in any typical bomb shelter, including a well, back-up generators, and so forth. The facility maintains a 6-months’ supply of everything it uses plus an additional supply of food. In the event that the facility was to be used as a shelter, it could house the entire population of the City of Palmdale for up to 2 weeks. A system is in place to allow open access to the facility in the event of such an emergency. The details are in the handout.

“Some would suggest that the Citadel is under some obligation to the community as a whole to provide healthcare. This is a non-profit corporation whose sole mission is to provide quality healthcare for the disadvantaged. The facility accepts Medicare and MediCal as payment in full for all services rendered. The new Palmdale Hospital on Palmdale Boulevard and 40th East is an excellent facility and can meet the needs of the remainder of the community. In the event of a life-threatening emergency, the Citadel will not turn anyone away. However, if the patient is not a qualified recipient of this facility services, he or she will be transferred to another facility as soon as it is medically advisable.

“All of the doctors who are on staff at the Citadel are also on staff at the new Palmdale Hospital and at one or both of the hospitals in Lancaster, so there will be no loss of continuity in treatment for any patient thus affected. In terms of number of beds, this is the smallest hospital in the Antelope Valley. The Citadel considers itself to be a partner in the medical community of the Antelope Valley and will work closely with the other 3 hospitals to provide the best possible medical care.

“I will conclude my statement with this. Somewhere during the last century or so the population of this great country of ours concluded that companies have no rights. Once you open your doors for business, you are not free to choose whom you will serve. That’s a crock and the product of some form of liberal mass hysteria. Everyone is so worried about being politically correct that they don’t worry about actually being right. We intend to change that. I will take a few questions at this time. If you ask a question that I’ve already answered, my response will be ‘asked and answered’ and I will move on to the next question. Shall we begin with our illustrious friend from the AV Press?

“You admit, then, that this facility is a bomb shelter,” the reporter asked.

“Asked and answered, next question.”

A reporter from the LA Times raised her hand and was recognized. “I note that the Security staff of this facility is armed, how do you explain that Mr. Olsen?”

“The entire Security Staff of this facility is made up of Reserve LA County Sheriff Deputies and since this is private property, we have elected to arm the staff. Next question.”

“Ron James with CNN,” the reporter said, “What gives the Citadel the right to decide whom it will treat?”

“Asked and answered. However, what gives anyone else the right to tell us whom we may choose to serve? Next question”

The news conference continued for about another half hour in the same manner. Reporters must be the most stupid creatures God ever created because they just kept trying to ask the same questions over and over again. When Gary had all he could take, he concluded the news conference and walked out of the room followed closely by Ron and Clarence. The only people left in the room were those armed security guards and the media people. The media tried to question the guards, but the guards appeared to be deaf unless the questions were for directions to a rest room or an exit.

California law does not permit any hospital to refuse to treat anyone. However, every law has loopholes and by not refusing to treat unqualified persons in life-threatening situations, the Foundations lawyers felt that they were narrowly in compliance with the law. Certainly if it were litigated, it would be a groundbreaker. Most cases of this sort involved hospitals refusing treatment to the disadvantaged, not to those who could afford treatment. Gary's handling of the press conference was the source of much amusement to many viewers who saw coverage of the event. He hadn't left the media a single opening and when they tried to force one, cut them off at the pass. The media coverage was scathing in its criticism of the goals of the facility. This led a rather liberal Democrat from the California Assembly to call for an investigation, but the Assembly got tied up in an argument over the matter and no investigation ensued. Governor Schwarzenegger was interviewed in his smoking tent and when asked his opinion of the new hospital replied, “Works for me.”

Had not other more dramatic stories arisen, the media would have probably given the Citadel far wider coverage, but in the end only the reporter from the AV Press continued to pursue the issue. Regrettably, he died in an auto accident attributed to a faulty brake line on his automobile and coverage of the matter ended abruptly. Accident investigators were puzzled by the reporter's accident because they'd never seen that type of damage to a brake line before. Although they suspected foul play, there simply wasn't enough evidence to open a criminal investigation and the matter went away.

The Three Amigos went through Johnny and set up a meeting with the LA County Sheriff and City of Palmdale Administration. The purpose of the meeting was to work out a contingency plan in the event the Citadel was ever called upon for use as a shelter. One of the features of the facility was the ability to bypass the airlocks in an emergency. With the proper computer command, the air pumps kicked into maximum output and both sets of inner and outer doors opened simultaneously, allowing for a steady ingress or egress from the building. The City Council set about arranging a transportation plan to rapidly move the population of the community to the Citadel in the event of an emergency. The Sheriff agreed to reassign all Deputies to the hospital in the event of such an

emergency once the Deputies were satisfied that all of the residents had been safely transported. In that event, all of the Security Staff of the facility would be placed on active duty with the Sheriff's Department.

There was no way that the Citadel could provide for the 120,000 residents of Palmdale in an emergency. While there was technically enough floor space, there was no way they could store 120,000 cots. The Three Amigos considered the issue carefully and decided to go with a basic ensulite pad and blanket for everyone. There was the further problem of trying to feed that many people. Even running 24/7, the cafeteria only sat about 300. Even if you limited people to a scant 10 minutes to eat, that was only 43,200 seats in 24-hours. The lowest level soon began to fill with MRE entrees and accessory packs, over 5 million of each.

"I've been doing some calculating here partner," Ron announced. "We have a problem."

"What might that be Ronald?" Gary asked.

"Well, this building is 400'x400'x6 floors, right?" Ron asked.

"Right."

"Ok, that's 960,000 gross square feet, right?"

"Right."

"And 960,000 divided by 120,000 is 8, right?"

"Right."

"And, that's gross square feet, not net, right?"

"Right."

"Then there isn't enough space to hold all 120,000 residents of Palmdale," Ron concluded.

"Right again, Ronald," Gary smiled.

"Then would you explain to me why we're planning on serving all 120,000 residents in the event of an emergency, please?" Ron frowned.

"We're not," Gary said.

"But you said..." Ron began.

"In the event that the facility were to be used as a shelter, it could house the entire

population of the City of Palmdale for up to 2 weeks,” Gary responded. “That’s technically true, but everyone would have to stand up for the 2 weeks. Ron, 85% of the people in Palmdale who are employed work in Los Angeles. Although the population of Palmdale is 120,000, you’d rarely find everyone at home at one time. I’m just guessing mind you, but if you assume each family is 2.3 people and each family has only one breadwinner, you’d typically have about 75,000 or less people in town, mostly women and children. I’d translate that to the equivalent of about 50,000 adults. Now, your gross square footage per person increases to 19 square feet. And, that’s assuming that you had all of the people in the shelter.”

The Three Amigos Part II – Revolution – Chapter 32 – The Prelude

“If you ever hear me say that my mama didn’t raise no fools, feel free to correct me,” Gary said.

“What’s that all about partner?” Ron asked.

“I just needed a little exercise and took Missy for a walk,” Gary explained.

“That must have been fun,” Ron chuckled.

“It was something, but I don’t know what,” Gary replied. “Stupid, that much is certain.”

“You ever get that blood sugar problem resolved?” Ron asked.

“Now that you mention it, I did, thank you,” Gary smiled. “My feet swelled up so badly from the Prednisone that I couldn’t get my shoes on and my blood sugar level just kept creeping up. I just said screw it and stopped the stuff. My blood sugar level fell from 365 to 241 in 2 hours and I ate breakfast in between the two tests. I’m more convinced than ever that the so called doctor is really that Sitar player in disguise,” Gary joked. “Then, I checked it again 4 hours later and it was 140. I know how to manage my blood sugar partner, but if I was following doctor’s orders, it would probably be 450.”

“Was it safe for you to stop the Prednisone like that?” Ron asked.

“Are we talking with each other?” Gary asked. “Must not have killed me. I’ve been on the crap before. Usually, they have you take 4 pills the 1st day, 3 pills for the next 2 days, 2 pills for the next 3 days and 1 pill for the next 4 days. That gives your adrenal glands a chance to kick back in slowly. But, I wasn’t on the crap that long, and they never gave me large doses except in the hospital. So, I just accelerated the withdrawal a little.”

“One of these days you’re going to end up killing yourself doing stuff like that,” Ron said.

“Good, then my feet will quit hurting,” Gary laughed.

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Jakarta, Indonesia...

“This is an ambitious plan, my brother,” the man said.

“Not nearly as ambitious as that plan to bomb airlines we had a few years back,” the other replied.

The two men were members of Jemaah Islamiah (JI)—the organization accused of the

Bali bombings in October 2002. The speakers were referring to the abortive 1995 scheme to plant bombs on 12 US airliners. Their names are of little import, but what was this new plan they were referring to? JI's real interest lay in Indonesia; however the country's population was 88% Muslim and they had an issue with a certain 'temporary' President of the US who had seen fit to attack fellow terrorists and innocent Muslims in the Middle East. The speakers were dedicated to the principle that the US must pay for its actions. Never mind the fact that those actions were in retaliation for actions against the US by their fellow Muslim terrorists. Reason and passion rarely travel in the same company. The plan was for Indonesian terrorists already living in the US to steal a large quantity of explosives, preferably TNT if possible, and to destroy an American icon, the Hoover Dam. Destroying the dam wouldn't necessarily result in a huge loss of life, but it would really make a statement and tell America that it wasn't exempt from retaliation for its behavior.

"Has Ali located the explosives yet?" the first speaker asked.

"No names, my brother," the other man hissed. "Never use names. Yes, our brother has secured a large quantity of product."

"And the plan?" the first asked.

"It will go forward as planned although I believe that it would have a far greater effect if we could have accomplished it last month. This state of California of the Americans is constantly on the ragged edge of electrical consumption, especially during the warm months. The loss of the energy from the target would most assuredly have pulled down the grid during the hot months. But, It is late September and it will now depend solely upon the weather," the second explained.

"So at best..." the first man said.

"We destroy the target and bring down the grid," the second man replied. "And at the worst, we destroy an American icon."

"When..." the first man began.

"The day after tomorrow, Sunday, September 17th, in the United States," the second replied.

Washington...

The NSA forwarded the intercept to the FBI and DHS with an uncharacteristic efficiency. The advice the second terrorist had given the first terrorist had been sound, if not timely. However the entire conversation was just cryptic enough that the analysts who received the intercept were initially at a loss to determine what the target was. They knew that one or more terrorists were going to attack a target in the US using explosives on Sunday. They had one first name, Ali. The reference to the grid and electrical consumption

suggested an electrical generation source. But the American icon thing had them stumped for a bit. What American icon generates electricity? Ah, the target was Hoover Dam. The information was hand carried to the White House where the President immediately ordered military units to the dam to protect it. On the off chance that they wouldn't intercept the bombers, DHS issued an Orange threat level for California, Nevada and Arizona and warned Mexican authorities of the possible danger to the dam.

Palmdale...

"What's this threat level orange all about?" Ron asked.

"From what I can get from FOX and CNN, the government intercepted a telephone call between two terrorists in Indonesia," Gary said. "Apparently, they've figured out that the terrorists are planning on blowing up Hoover Dam on Sunday. Anyway, they issued the warning in case they aren't able to stop the terrorists and the dam goes. Frankly, I'm surprised that we have that much information."

"What's our worst case scenario here partner?" Ron inquired.

"We're in no danger whatsoever at the Citadel, Ron," Gary replied. "It's a couple of hundred miles to the river, so water is no threat and hopefully even if the dam goes it won't pull down the electrical grid. The temperatures haven't been that bad so I think the state is ok on electricity, too."

"Do we need to touch bases with the Sheriff and City?" Clarence asked.

"Gee, I wouldn't think so, no," Gary replied. "I mean even if we lost power, which I think is unlikely, why would anyone need shelter?"

[Gar-Bear, I'm ashamed of you! Haven't you heard of Murphy's Laws? Oh well, live and learn, you crusty old curmudgeon.]

California imports a substantial portion of the energy it uses. There hadn't been any new construction of electrical generation plants in over ten years according to one source. But, the picture in 2007 wasn't nearly as bleak. Gary was right to be unconcerned, but he hadn't left room for Murphy, and the devil is in the details. Of course Gary hadn't told Ron that since he quit taking the Prednisone, his left hand hurt so badly that he couldn't type. Apparently he'd sprained his hand during his first escape attempt while in the hospital. But, his blood sugar was down and high blood sugar would kill him faster than the sprain.

The military sent a SEAL Team to examine the base of Hoover Dam just in case Ali and his friends had already planted explosives. They failed to locate the large quantity of TNT attached to the timer and buried in the mud at the foot of the dam. Murphy had struck for the first time. A stuck water valve at the San Onofre 2, San Clemente, CA forced a safe shutdown of the reactor. Murphy had struck again. And an unexpected hot

day pushed energy consumption to record levels for a September 17th. Murphy was done and so was California.

On the early afternoon of Sunday, September 17th, 2007 at 2:00pm the contacts closed on the timer and the TNT detonated. A large waterspout rose from behind the dam and subsided. Everyone realized that the SEALS had missed the bomb. Most of the soldiers assumed that the explosives had been poorly placed and that everything was all right. The explosives experts knew better and sounded the alarm. They hadn't needed to see the movie *Force 10 from Navarone* (1978) to know what was about to happen. Water doesn't compress and dams are fragile creatures in certain circumstances. The accumulated mud at the base of the dam placed the explosives well up on the face of the dam. From that point on it was a matter of physics. FOX News happened to be doing a live feed from the dam when the TNT detonated and The Three Amigos just happened, believe it or not, to be watching the news. They were hoping to get some information about the threat against the dam, but got more than they bargained for.

"Oh crap," Gary said when the waterspout appeared on the screen. "There goes the dam."

"What do you, mean Gary?" Clarence said, "The dam is still standing."

"Clarence, you need to go to the movies more," Ron grimaced.

"We've got to cut the electrical feed," Gary urged, "Before the dam goes down and pulls our system down with it."

"I thought you said we were ok," Ron said.

"I think I forgot about Murphy, Ron," Gary answered, "I saw a local item earlier that Reactor #2 at San Onofre had to be shut down because of a stuck water valve. And in the same newscast they were expecting record temps today. I think that I put my foot in my mouth."

Gary turned to a computer terminal, entered a password and instructed the computer to cut the electrical feed of excess energy to the grid. As The Three Amigos sat and watched, the troops began to rush from the dam in response to the warnings from the military specialists. It sure went faster in the movie, but there's just something about the laws of physics and the dam began to crack and a small stream of water appeared from the face. As the crack began to open, the TV suddenly went off the air.

"Well, the grid just went down," Gary announced. "But, the TV should be back up as soon as their backup generator kicks in."

The words were barely out of his mouth before the TV signal returned.

"I guess they were watching, too," Gary chuckled. The 3 men sat transfixed as the dam

came apart.

“Davis will go next,” Gary announced, “And then we’ll lose Parker. Laguna Dam is located 13 miles northeast of Yuma, Arizona, and about 5 miles downstream from Imperial Dam. But, I’d expect we might lose them too.”

“Hasn’t this country been through enough?” Clarence asked. “You’re talking losing 5 dams here all on account of one measly little explosion.”

“Just be happy they didn’t take out Glen Canyon Clarence or we’d be out Lake Powell, too,” Gary grimaced again.

“Tell me something Gary Olsen,” Clarence said. “Is there anything you don’t know a little something about?”

“More things than there are stars in the heavens pal,” Gary said, “But I like to watch those educational channels on TV and they usually get me curious about things so I surf the web and find out all I can. Knowledge is power Clarence. Besides, I do a lot of research for my fiction and every time I run across something I can maybe use in a story, I bookmark it for future reference. I still make plenty of goofs, but you have to be essentially accurate in a story if you want your stuff to be believable. Now if you were to ask me what I had for breakfast, I’d have to stop and think about it and maybe couldn’t remember. But ask me the height of the Eiffel Tower and I’d tell you 986’. I read that in a Superman comic book, I think, when I was in Junior High School. You should have known me when my memory was working full time, it would have really po’d you.”

True to Gary’s prediction, the floodwaters along the Colorado River began to take out the dams. With the collapse of each successive dam, the volume of water grew, making the collapse of the next dam even more likely. When finally the water had made its way to México, the entire Colorado River basin was destroyed. In 1901, the California Development Company, seeking to realize the Imperial Valley’s potential for unlimited agricultural productivity, dug irrigation canals from the Colorado River. Heavy silt loads, however, inhibited the flow and new residents of the valley became worried. This prompted the engineers to create a cut in the western bank of the Colorado to allow more water to reach the valley. Unfortunately, heavy flood waters broke through the engineered canal and nearly all the river’s flow rushed into the valley. By the time the breach was closed, the present-day Salton Sea was formed.

The Three Amigos Part II – Revolution – Chapter 33 – Aftermath

When Air Force One arrived at Nellis AFB around 10am on September 18th, the Governors of the states of Nevada, California and Arizona were waiting for the President. A VH-60-N Whitehawk had been ferried in overnight so the HMX-1 pilots could take the President and the Governors on a tour of the Colorado River Basin. They began at Hoover Dam and followed the path of destruction to Yuma. Marine One landed there to refuel and afford the President the opportunity to deliver his planned news conference. Hoover Dam had been constructed during the years 1931-1935 at a cost of \$175 million. It impounded water for Lake Mead and at full capacity, the lake held 28.5 million acre-feet of water. Parker Dam, the third dam to fall had been built in the years 1934-1938 and supplied water to Los Angeles. While Hoover could produce 4 billion kilowatts of energy per year, Parker's capacity was about 1 billion kilowatts. Between the two lay Davis Dam, which had been completed in 1953. It produced between 1 and 2 billion kilowatts of electricity per year. Further down, Laguna and Imperial Dams were diversion dams that didn't generate power. Davis Dam's primary purpose was to ensure delivery of approximately 1.5 million acre-feet of water to México.

Many people had died as a result of the dams bursting, but the loss of life was far less than expected, primarily due to the orange threat level issued by DHS. Economically and in other terms, the event was a major disaster. Los Angeles, San Diego and Tucson had lost their water supplies or major portions thereof. Initial estimates of the cost of replacing the dams ran to \$3 billion. And time was most certainly a factor. The same whiz kid had estimated it would take between 6 and 8 years to replace the 5 dams. And already enduring power shortages, California was in big trouble, with a capital B.

The best that California could hope for was accelerating the construction of the new power plants under construction. Governor Schwarzenegger had issued an immediate Executive Order banning the use of water for all but drinking purposes until the ramifications were known for all of southern California. By the time Marine One reached Yuma, Arnold was ready to resign. The President made a few remarks on the scope of the disaster and promised to immediately introduce legislation for have the dams rebuilt. The Arizona Governor spoke next, outlining the problems the event represented for his state followed by the Governor from Nevada.

Arnold came last and he tried to break the somber mood of the crowd with his opening remark, "And I thought Gray Davis had problems!" He went on to indicate that all power plant construction in California would be accelerated but that southern California now faced an even larger problem, the loss of the water. At the urging of a staff member Arnold indicated that he would immediately introduce legislation for the construction of desalinization plants to meet the needs of southern California, but that it was far too early to speculate on the adequacy of that solution.

Jakarta, Indonesia...

The three men were gathered in a private residence. Riduan Isamuddin, better known

as Hambali and the two men whose telephone conversation had been intercepted by the NSA had met to discuss the near failure of their 'American Project'.

"Fools," Hambali said. "Your carelessness almost cost us this operation."

"But leader," the second, more cautious man from the earlier phone conversation said, "The operation was a far greater success than we had ever anticipated."

"This is not to your credit, brother," Hambali retorted. "Had not our brother in America planted the explosives earlier than planned, we would have been found out and the effort would have been wasted. As it was, only chance prevented those American SEALs from discovering and disarming the explosives. And how is it that you were so foolish to use a name over the telephone? Are you not aware that the Americans have been tracking our brother Osama through his phone calls?"

"We were guarded in our conversation leader," the second man spoke.

"Obviously not guarded enough, brother," Hambali snapped.

"What of the next phase of our plan, leader," the first man finally found his voice.

"We shall have to postpone the next phase until we can be sure that the American FBI has not discovered who our brother in America is," Hambali responded, his anger clear.

"In the meantime, you will remove yourselves from my sight before I lose control of my anger." Hambali announced.

Washington...

"It would appear Mr. President that this new terrorist campaign is part of a larger plan," Director Mueller said. "The name we have could be anyone of more than a dozen individuals. And we only have locations on six of those people. Our field agents tell me that none of those 6 persons could have been involved because they have been under constant surveillance. Therefore we are going to concentrate on locating the other six persons."

"How certain are you of your information?" the President asked.

"Candidly, about 80%," Mueller replied. "However, if we cannot identify who Ali really is, we could be in trouble here."

"And I'm told that the explosives that they used were stolen American explosives, is that true?"

"Regrettably yes Mr. President, the Bureau was working closely with ATF to identify the thieves, but we kept coming up empty."

“I can’t really justify doing anything to Indonesia, you know,” the President observed. “They’ve been doing their best to get the terrorism in check over there. That guy they convicted of being behind the Bali bombings was railroaded, you know. He was behind it all right, but they couldn’t really prove it. Hell, they convicted him anyway.”

“There are times, I’d have to admit, that I wouldn’t mind our being able to do that,” Mueller chuckled. “But the USA Patriot Act had as many downsides as benefits, so I suppose we’d better just stay with what works.”

“I want you to hook up with the DCI and the DHS Secretary and put together a task force,” the President ordered. “I’ll touch bases with the other two so they’ll know to expect you. Better get the ATF involved too, they’re the explosives experts.”

“Yes sir,” Mueller replied. “Will there be anything else Mr. President?”

“Not unless you can come up with a few billion to rebuild those dams, no,” the President chuckled.

“Sorry sir, I’m afraid that one’s outside of my job description,” Mueller chuckled.

Michigan...

The cell that Ali belonged to operated out of Dearborn. He and one of the others were highly qualified divers and explosives experts. The other two members of the cell were essentially their security for when a diving mission was on. Ali had stolen the TNT used to blow Hoover from a Michigan explosives distributor and hauled the stuff halfway across the country. He had intended to use an 8-day timer for the detonator and plant the TNT 4 days prior to the scheduled explosion. However to ensure that they could complete their mission timely, they 4 men had elected to leave 3 days early. Once they arrived at the dam, they realized that placing the explosives might be a bit harder than they had anticipated so they had gone ahead and started right away. The soft silt at the foot of the dam made a perfect hiding place for the charges and they buried the explosives as deeply as possible. His last dive was to set the timer and that was 6 days before the scheduled explosion. By the time the US government had uncovered the plot, Ali and his companions were already back in Dearborn.

Ali had received a message from Hambali directing that he and his companions lay low for a while until the government’s search petered out. This turned out to be perfect for Ali because he couldn’t risk hitting the same distributor for explosives and he needed to find another source. It seemed as if every state had one or more major explosives distributors and Ali began to surf the web identifying possible candidates for his next theft. It occurred to him that he had to make the next theft as far away from Michigan as possible or he risked waiving a flag at law enforcement and the ATF. The TNT that Ali preferred to use was rather hard to come by because most mining operations used the ANFO slurry. Having located several promising targets, Ali and one of the security men

set off to check out the security at the various locations.

“This is the one, my brother,” Ali said, “Their security is so poor that we can get all that we need from this source.”

“I agree, you would have thought that after our success at that dam, the Americans would have tightened up security much more than we can see,” the companion replied. “How much of the explosive do we require for the next mission?”

“I believe that we can do it with 1,000-kilos,” Ali replied, “But, if we can get more, we should. This will reduce our risk of discovery. I have gone to that AFT website and it was most revealing. As Allah wills it, I believe that we should take several thousand kilos.”

“I know nothing of explosives, my brother,” the companion said, “So it shall be as you say.”

Two nights later, the explosives distributorship was burgled. The thieves made off with what amount to a truckload of high order explosives, detonators, timers and det cord. The theft wasn't discovered for about 5 hours. By that time, the Hertz rental truck was halfway to Dearborn with Ali in trail in the car. When they arrived in Dearborn, the truck was quickly unloaded into a storage locker and they drove the truck to South Bend, Indiana where they turned it in as originally agreed with the rental company. Ali and the companion returned to Dearborn to await further instructions.

Palmdale...

“What's up Ron?” Gary asked.

“I don't know where to begin,” Ron shook his head. “First, we had a call from Edison wanting us to release power to them. They are offering quite a premium at the moment; do you think we should do it?”

“If our marginal return exceeds the cost of the fuel, I suppose we might as well,” Gary replied. “My best guess is that we might be able to supply them with as much as 6 megawatts if we run the generators and the solar array.”

“I thought that you might feel that way so I told them yes,” Ron smiled.

“Well if you'd already told them yes, why did you ask?” Gary countered.

“So you could feel like you're in charge around here,” Ron replied.

“What's second?” Gary ignored the remark.

“Did you hear about the explosives theft last night?” Ron asked.

“No, where did that happen?” Gary asked.

“West Virginia of all places,” Ron said, “Apparently the thieves made off with about a truckload of high order explosives. ATF held a news conference and they all up in arms and apparently DHS, ATF and the FBI are putting together a new taskforce to try and track down the thieves.”

“You don’t suppose that it was the same guys who blew Hoover Dam, do you?” Gary asked.

“Hell, nothing would surprise me partner,” Ron responded. “Apparently the explosives that they used on the dam were stolen and that job last night netted them about 3 times as many explosives, if you can believe CNN.”

“Do you have any other good news or can I go hide in my computer room now?” Gary smirked.

“Well, now that you mention it...” Ron said.

“What?” Gary asked.

“That’s all I have.”

“Have you seen Clarence lately? It’s like I have BO or something. He hasn’t been around in a couple of days,” Gary inquired.

“What with all of this new found wealth of ours, Clarence has started a project,” Ron commented.

“Oh, what’s he doing?”

“You’re sitting down, right?” Ron said.

“You can see that I am, butthead,” Gary snapped, “What’s old brother Clarence up to?”

“He’s building a bomb shelter in his backyard,” Ron laughed.

“Why in the hell would he do that when he has the Citadel to come to?” Gary asked shocked.

“Oh, probably for the same reason that Lyn and I are,” Ron said, “To avoid the crowds.”

“Say what? There’s plenty of room in this building,” Gary glared.

“There was, until you invited the whole darn town to move in,” Ron retorted. “I got a ruler

and marked out 19 square feet on my kitchen floor. It's a rectangle 6'4" long by 3' wide. No thanks partner, we're putting in our own shelter and I'm putting in a big screen TV. I'll use it as a hideaway when Lyn and I are fighting."

"I thought the two of you didn't fight anymore," Gary observed.

"We still fight, I just don't win anymore," Ron laughed.

The Three Amigos Part II – Revolution – Chapter 34 – Danger Zone

*Revvin' up your engine
Listen to her howlin' roar
Metal under tension
Beggin' you to touch and go*

*Highway to the Danger Zone
Ride into the Danger Zone*

*Headin' into twilight
Spreadin' out her wings tonight
She got you jumpin' off the track
And shovin' into overdrive*

*Highway to the Danger Zone
I'll take you
Right into the Danger Zone*

Guess it's been a while since I mentioned Top Gun, huh?

The Indonesian terrorists were sitting in Dearborn cooling their heels. They tried to get jobs at a 7-11, but weren't Iranian. They ended up working at a carwash instead.

Director Mueller, together with DCI Goss and the new Secretary of DHS, a fella named Rick Santorum, had brought in the head of ATF, Truscott for a sit down conference.

"The President told me he'd let you know what he had in mind," Mueller said, "Is everyone up to speed on why we're here?"

Continuing, Mueller said, "What does the ATF have on the theft of the TNT they used on Hoover Dam and while you're at it what about that explosives theft?"

"We're at a dead end for now on the first theft," Truscott admitted, "And it's way too early in our investigation to know about this truckload of explosives that were taken."

"Up against a stone wall?" Mueller asked.

"We had one lead Bob," Truscott replied. "Apparently a Filipino rented a Hertz truck the day of the burglary, but so far that appears to be a dead end. He made a one way trip to South Bend and turned the truck in there as agreed."

"Did you run it for forensics?" Mueller asked.

"It was too late, they'd already detailed the truck," Truscott explained.

“How did the mileage compare with the normal distance for a trip like that?” Mueller asked.

“Well, it was a little high, but the fella told Hertz that he got lost and ended up putting on the extra mileage. He even tried to get them not to charge him for the extra miles claiming he was a college student.”

“Did you check that?” Mueller asked.

“He has a valid student Visa to attend college in the US,” Truscott said.

“Ok, but is he enrolled in a college in the South Bend area?” Mueller asked.

“We’re still checking, but as of now, no,” Truscott explained.

“Well, it’s mighty thin, but it has to be checked out,” Mueller said, “Do you want to finish it up or have us take over?”

“We’ll work it for now and let you know if anything turns up.”

“Ok by me,” Mueller replied. “Rick, what’s your thinking on the threat level?”

“We’re back at yellow for now, but I’ve been talking to the President about going back to orange until those explosives turn up,” Santorum answered. “However, we’re a little leery of going back to orange without something more definite.”

“Port, what’s going on in your shop?” Mueller asked.

“We’re pretty sure that Hambali from JI was behind it, but no one can find the guy,” Porter Goss replied. “NSA gave us a copy of the tape and we’re trying to do some voice-print analysis and matching at the moment.”

“Let me know if there’s anything we can do to help, Port,” Mueller acknowledged.

“Rick, since you’re the highest ranking member in the room,” Mueller suggested, “I’d feel a whole lot more comfortable if you’d Chair this taskforce.”

“Bob, I don’t have the time. Thanks, but no thanks,” Santorum replied.

“We have 2 teams of Special Agents working the West Virginia area looking for anything we can find,” Mueller finally offered. “As much as I hate to say it, I think that we’re doing everything we can for the moment. I don’t suppose that there have been anymore NSA intercepts have there?”

“Haven’t heard anything Bob,” Porter remarked.

Palmdale...Flash!! Medical update...

It had come time to start visiting the doctors as a final follow up to his earlier hospital stay. It was such a waste of time, but, why take a chance? Gary started with the Sitar player. Gary had been asked 1,000 times if he were related to the famous baseball player with the same last name and he couldn't resist. The doc must have had the same experience. He wasn't related, but he sure knew a lot about his namesake, like the guy had remarried and his new wife was 32 years old. Gary told the doc flat out that he respected the medical profession, but that he considered doctor's instructions to be medical advice to be considered but not necessarily followed. The doc was amused and retorted with, "I knew you were going to be trouble the minute we took you off the respirator." Gary told him that he'd discontinued the Prednisone and all the doc said was, "Good, I was going to take you off it anyway." Then the subject of computers had come up and it turned out that the doc and Gary had started using computers at the same time, right after IBM brought out the PC. The only lingering problem Gary had was edema of his feet and ankles. The doc said they'd have to keep an eye on that and wrote Gary Rx's for a Nebulizer and a bunch of the Albuterol.

Old Gar-Bear had been doing the physician's samples bit for years and he had noticed an ad for Diovan taped on the office wall. When the nurse came by, Gar hit her up for some Diovan. All they had was the 80/12.5 so Gary passed. But then, when the doc said his feet were swollen, Gary decided that the 12.5 might be a good idea. That was the diuretic they added to the drug. Made out pretty good on samples at the doc's office. Then Sharon drove Gary to LA to pick up the Nebulizer. While they were there they dropped by Dr. J's office, list in hand, looking for samples. They made out pretty good there too. As an afterthought, Gar asked if they happened to have any Prevacid. He scored 6 5-capsule boxes. After they picked up the Nebulizer, Gary stopped by another of his doctor's offices and scored 10 more 5 capsule boxes of Prevacid.

It wasn't a bad day's work. \$600 worth of drugs free and it only cost them \$20 for eats and \$10 for gas. By the time they'd gotten home, Gary's feet were the size of balloons. Well, now, Dr. Olsen went to his drug box and prescribed himself some Dyazide 50/25 to help with the swelling. Then, like the fool that he sometimes was, he took one of the pills before he went to bed. Bet you can guess what he spent the night doing. Ron was probably right; one of these days old Doc Olsen was going to self-medicate himself to death. Reader's Digest had claimed for years that Humor is the Best Medicine. When it came to dealing with those doctors, Gary applied that philosophy. Not one of his doctors was short in the humor department. And the Sitar player had managed to one up our amigo at every turn. This was going to work out just fine.

Washington...

Despite the posturing, none of the agencies had a clue who might have taken the explosives. The ATF was reasonably convinced that this Filipino lead was a dead end, but it was all they had so they put a dozen agents on the project. They had forensic artists work with the rental clerk and the turn-in clerk and ended up with a couple of sketches

that bore only the slightest resemblance. And, they were hitting the campuses looking for the 'Filipino' and coming up empty. It took a while, but someone finally put 2 and 2 together and they decided that they might just be on to something after all. For whatever reason, Muslims tended to congregate in certain locales and Michigan was one such locale. Talk about looking for a needle in a haystack! Truscott passed the information along to Mueller, Goss and Santorum and the next thing you knew, Indiana and Michigan were swarming with feds.

One of the idiosyncrasies of many Americans was that 'all Orientals looked alike' to them. And when you got right down to the fine point, an Indonesian and a Filipino were first cousins. The Philippines' had two official languages - Filipino (based on Tagalog) and English; eight major dialects - Tagalog, Cebuano, Ilocan, Hiligaynon or Ilonggo, Bicol, Waray, Pampango, and Pangasinense. Indonesians spoke Bahasa Indonesia (official, modified form of Malay), English, Dutch, local dialects, the most widely spoken of which is Javanese. Did you notice the word 'Malay'? The population of the Philippines was Christian Malay 91.5%, Muslim Malay 4%, Chinese 1.5%, other 3% while the population of the Indonesia was Javanese 45%, Sundanese 14%, Madurese 7.5%, coastal Malays 7.5%, other 26%.

It was a darned miracle that the feds could find any of the terrorists living in the US. And, if you were talking about someone from the now crispy Middle East, how much difference was there between an Iranian, Iraqi, Syrian, Jordanian, or Saudi? And, the US was the great melting pot, after all. Nine times out of ten, the feds catch a break in a case like this when someone comes forward with some information. Ali and his companions were fairly reclusive and no one had a clue that your friendly Indonesian terrorist cell was living right down the block.

Jakarta...

"It would appear that the American authorities have been unsuccessful in locating our brothers in America," Hambali said. "This is most fortunate for the two of you. It was they who made the large explosives theft that CNN reported. According to the leader, they have enough explosives for the next three objectives."

"Then we will resume?" the first man asked.

"Yes, we will resume," Hambali replied. "However, I have decided to change objectives. It is starting to get cold in America with the winter coming. These Americans have such a fragile balance during the winter when it comes to fuel supplies that any severe disruption of their energy supplies could be disastrous."

"What is the new target?" the second man asked.

"Only our leader in America and I know that, my brother," Hambali replied, "You still have to re-earn my trust."

Palmdale...

“What do you make of Arnold’s proposal to build 4 desalinization plants?” Ron asked Gary.

“Too little, too late,” Gary replied. “Of the more than 7,500 desalination plants in operation worldwide, 60% are located in the Middle East. The world’s largest plant in Saudi Arabia produces 128 MGD of desalted water. In contrast, 12% of the world’s capacity is produced in the Americas, with most of the plants located in the Caribbean and Florida. To date, only a limited number of desalination plants have been built along the California coast, primarily because the cost of desalination is generally higher than the costs of other water supply alternatives available in California (e.g., water transfers and groundwater pumping).”

“I see you’ve been back out on the net,” Ron chuckled.

“Well, when I heard that proposal he made, I got curious, so naturally I went searching,” Gary said. “Information is power, pal.”

“I see where the feds are concentrating their search for those terrorists in Indiana and Michigan,” Ron commented.

“If the feds are looking there, that probably means the terrorists are in Chicago,” Gary laughed.

Substantial portions of the homes in the US are heated by natural gas. In the northeastern US, fuel oil is widely used in certain areas. In order to succeed disrupting the energy, e.g., fuel supplies, all Ali and his companions had to do was blow a couple of natural gas pipelines and a couple of fuel oil pipelines. Done at the right time of the year, the effect would truly be devastating as people began to use up their fuel oil or lost their natural gas service. And, a pipeline is such a small target as compared to a dam. The US is a web of pipelines and all of them pass through rural areas. At Hambali’s direction, Ali began to research the American pipeline system. Low and behold, he ran into a problem. Apparently in response to the 9/11/01 attacks on the WTC and Pentagon, the government had seen fit to remove a lot of information about pipelines from the Internet.

There hadn’t always been an Internet and Ali was forced to do what millions had done before him, visit the Public Library. It took a full day worth of searching, but he ended up with a list of targets. He and his fellow diver began to consider the targets and narrow their list. They carefully mapped a route that would allow them to start in Kansas City and end in New York. Their best estimate was that they could make the run, set the explosives and be back in Dearborn in 8 days, and they had so many of those 8-day timers. The cache of high order explosives included any number of shaped charges and the two men decided that they could get by with about 100 kilos of the high order explosives. Then, Ali sat back to watch the weather channel, waiting for the arrival of the next big storm.

The Three Amigos Part II – Revolution – Chapter 35 – Baby It's Cold Outside

The Weather Channel announced that Thanksgiving was going to be a problem in 2007. One of the most widely traveled holidays, long range forecasts were for a winter storm commencing east of the Rockies the day before Thanksgiving and moving to the east. If the predictions were correct, the storm would hit New England about 4-5 days later. This was what Ali had been waiting for and they retrieved about 150 kilos of shaped charges from the storage locker together with a dozen timers. Their vehicle, a closed van, was old and non-descript and no one would give it a second look. The 4 men headed for Kansas City.

Timing is everything and the men were set for a wild ride. The week before Thanksgiving, they planted explosives on 2 natural gas pipelines and one fuel oil pipeline in the Kansas City area. All 12 timers were preset and activated at the same time to ensure that when eventually they tripped, it would happen simultaneously. The men then began the mad dash to the east coast, planting charges along the way. On the 7th day, they arrived back in Dearborn, having traveled non-stop to complete their mission. Everything was in place and they'd even managed to plant explosives on their alternate targets. The trip had been slow, but steady and they hadn't attracted a bit of attention. These Americans were so easy!

Palmdale...

"I'm sure glad we don't live where the snow falls," Gary said, "Have you seen the weather forecasts?"

"FOX said that they's going to get up to 10" of snow in Denver," Clarence nodded.

"Perfect time for a terrorist attack," Ron said, "Take out a few pipelines in the middle of a storm like this and people would freeze their butts off."

"Bite your tongue, Ronald. Speaking of terrorists attacks, did either of you happen to catch that story on CNN about the final cost estimate to replace the 5 dams? \$14.75 billion with a B. Their best guess is 4 years completion time, too. Man there won't be any unemployment in this country for the next 4 years."

"How's the country going to afford that?" Ron asked.

"Hell, I don't know, crank up the printing presses and print more money?" Gary laughed.

On the day after Thanksgiving, 12 pipelines were set to explode. When the pipelines went, the US would face a disaster almost as great as it had when Hoover Dam had been taken out. Power plants that depended upon natural gas as fuel to power their generators would be brought down in short order due to fuel starvation. Forewarned of the pending storms, however, most New Englanders who depended upon fuel oil to heat their homes had filled their fuel tanks. The sudden demand for fuel oil caused the

price to rise 11 cents per gallon, but people just bought the fuel and grumbled. The National Weather Service was predicting that this storm had the potential of being 'the storm of the century'. One of the most intense Nor'easters to ever strike the Eastern United States did so in the second week of March, 1993. Record low pressures, wind speeds, low temperatures and snowfall amounts were more than enough for this storm to gain the status of "Storm of the Century" even during its existence. Indeed, this storm was monumental, killing over 250 people and cancelling 25% of the United States' flights for two days.

There was to be a collision of two weather fronts, one coming in from the west and expected to hit Denver the day before Thanksgiving and a Northeaster expected to strike New England on Thanksgiving Day. Those folks in Pennsylvania were really in for it. The odds on such an occurrence were astronomical, but stuff happens. What were the odds on Florida being hit by 3 back-to-back hurricanes in 2004? As Mr. Spock would say, all things are possible.

Washington DC...Monday, November 19, 2007

The task group leaders, Santorum, Mueller, Goss and Truscott were gathered on the Monday before Thanksgiving to review what they had learned.

"I realize that it's like shutting the barn door after the horse is gone," Truscott announced, "But we pulled the licenses on both of those explosives distributors who were burgled. Our investigation showed that neither of them had anything like adequate security to protect against those thefts. They were so far out of compliance with the Safe Explosives Act that this will put them out of business. As I told all of you, this lead we have with the Filipino student is very promising, but we haven't found him yet."

"We haven't had any better luck finding him either," Mueller acknowledged. "But, I agree, finding this guy is the key to unraveling this entire mess. CIA have anything new?"

"We've heard some rumors over that past couple of days, but nothing specific," Goss stated. "I only received enough information this morning to be able to bring the subject up. And, the rumors are so vague as to be almost useless. All we're hearing is that there is something brewing for around Thanksgiving. But, it's pretty thin and we don't have a clue what it is."

"Darn it," Santorum responded, "Here we are faced with what some meteorologists are saying will be the storm of the century and we're also facing a terrorist attack. Do you know how many million people travel over the Thanksgiving holiday? The President is going to love this."

"I don't envy you one bit Mr. Secretary," Goss responded. "Either way you go on this, you're going to be burned. If you raise the threat level, that's going to mess up travel and if you don't and the terrorists do pull something, the public and press will put you

through the meat grinder.”

“I’m going to pass the buck on this one, maybe,” Rick said. “Ultimately, it’s the President’s responsibility. But, I will recommend that we go to orange and follow his lead.”

The men visited a while longer and adjourned the meeting. Santorum made an appointment to see the President on an ‘urgent matter.’ When he got to the White House he outlined what little they knew and bit the bullet recommending that the threat level be raised to orange for the entire country. The former Speaker of the House wasn’t planning on running for election in 2008 so he wasn’t burdened by personal political considerations. Nevertheless, if he made the wrong decision, the Republican Party would take it in the chops in 2008. As he sat there, he remembered his days in Korea at the Chosin Reservoir. The threat level was raised to orange and Santorum left to arrange for the announcement.

Palmdale...same day...

“I’m sure glad I’m not the President,” Ron said. “Can you imagine being forced to issue an elevated threat level over Thanksgiving?”

“Weren’t we on orange on Thanksgiving of 2001, right after the WTC?” Clarence asked.

“Got me fellas,” Gary said, “I can’t remember what I had for breakfast this morning.”

“I can’t remember when they established DHS, Clarence, so I can’t tell you either,” Ron said, “But, I suspect not. I’ll tell you one thing that I’m becoming pretty certain about, though. We are not winning the war on terror.”

“I don’t think it’s possible to win a war on terrorism Ron,” Gary observed. “As long as you have one crackpot out there with an agenda and the means to carry it out, you’re going to have the threat. Do you remember those hearings back in 2004 that resulted in George Tenet resigning as DCI? They started gutting the CIA in the 1970’s and then Clinton sort of finished the job. I think the CIA did a remarkable job, given the limitations imposed on them. They’ve been forced to rely so much on ElInt that they barely have any HumInt assets anymore. I would have to agree on the turf wars criticisms, but that’s just good old normal American politics that turns around once in a while to bite you on the butt. They put the Goss fella in as DCI, but he said it would take him a while to get up to speed. As I remember it, the CIA was so screwed over that the best estimate was 5 years to rebuild the agency. Hell, in 5 years the Democrats could be back in power and start gutting the agency again.”

“For the President’s sake, I almost hope the terrorists do strike, even though I can’t think of anything I’d like less,” Ron replied.

It began snowing during the early morning hours of November 21 east of the Rockies. By noon road advisories were out for the entire states of Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas

and Nebraska. By early evening the airport had been forced to close in Denver, seriously disrupting the plans of holiday travelers. It would only be later that the disgruntled travelers learned just how lucky they'd been NOT to be able to travel. The storm was moving rapidly, perhaps 30mph, to the east. The winds were just shy of 60mph and gusting even higher. It was perhaps one of the worst blizzards in recent memory. Some of the airlines diverted their Denver flights to Kansas City and Chicago, but O'Hare was already about maxed out and as a consequence, hundreds of thousands of travelers had their travel plans cancelled by Mother Nature.

The following day, Thanksgiving, the Nor'easter blew in. It wasn't quite as bad as had been expected, but was nearly the equal of the 1993 storm. Given the advanced warning of the storm, most folks were in pretty good shape when it came to the home heating oil. People changed their plans and many of them rescheduled their travel for the Christmas season. Like it or not, most of America ended up staying home or nearby for Thanksgiving, 2007.

On Friday, November 23, 2007 at 08:35 EST, the 12 timers' contacts closed. Ali and his diver buddy had done an excellent job of placing the explosives and the dozen pipelines bit the dust. Back in 2004, the US had experienced a rash of pipeline bombings by Iraqi insurgents. Most of the time, it took a couple of weeks to get the pipelines repaired and the product flowing. Most of the time; and they had near ideal working conditions in Iraq. But here we were in the middle of what was being debated as to whether or not it was the storm of the century and we had 12 broken pipelines, mostly natural gas. There was no way to send out repair parties, the visibility was maybe 100' under ideal conditions and there weren't many ideal conditions to be found.

The effect of losing the natural gas pipelines was dramatic, even traumatic. Utilities that depended upon natural gas to power their equipment shut down immediately, causing a widespread power blackout. Homes and buildings that depended upon natural gas for heating not only lost their electricity, but also their heating. Even the folks who used fuel oil to heat their homes were mostly up the creek because they had no power to run the fan motors on their furnaces. The fortunate few who had fireplaces and wood to burn in them were able to tough it out. It was so cold outside that they simply emptied the contents of their refrigerators and/or freezers and put the stuff on a back porch or in their unheated garage.

Hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of people didn't have that luxury, however. This wasn't 1776 and not every home in America had a fireplace. And, some of those that did had a gas log, hence no firewood. They could always have removed the gas log and burned wood in the fireplace, but to be able to burn wood, you must first have it on hand and the fireplace had to have been intended to burn wood. If it were intended to burn a gas log from the outset, retrofitting was extremely expensive.

The western states, so badly hit by the downing of Hoover Dam, essentially escaped any problems. But then, they were dealing with problems of their own like the worst water shortage in history. And it was winter and electrical consumption was well down so

those Californians, Nevadans and Arizonans did just fine. Up in places like Montana, the people were making out pretty well, except for dealing with the storm. But, across the Midwest to the east coast, people were in trouble. When the power grids began to fail, they pulled down the grid servicing Michigan and even Ali and his 'brothers' began to freeze. In a matter of hours, all of the Radio and TV networks had somehow managed to get back online and they began to broadcast horror stories about people being stranded in their homes without electricity and/or fuel to heat their homes.

"Did you bite your tongue like I told you to, butthead?" Gary asked Ron.

"I said it would be a perfect time for terrorists to strike, now didn't I," Ron retorted. "It's not my fault they listened. Man, that must be a bear being stranded in a home in freezing weather without any electricity or heat."

"I remember when I was about 4 years old something like this happening," Gary started. "It was when we lived west of Greene, say about 1947. That little old house didn't have a fireplace or nothing. The only source of heat was the wood-burning kitchen stove. Come to think of it, we didn't have electricity, either, just oil lamps. Anyway, my dad had plenty of firewood laid in next to the house, I guess. Man, that stove was almost glowing cherry red trying to get that house warm. That house wasn't insulated either. Hell, we couldn't even go to the outhouse and had to crap in a pail. So I guess you're right Ron, it's probably a real bitch for all of those soft folks used to turning on a light switch or adjusting the thermostat."

"You don't sound like you have much sympathy for them," Clarence observed.

"Pity, maybe, but everyone just assumes that the lights will always work and never is prepared for anything," Gary replied. "Sharon put a gas log in the house on Moonraker, but we kept the firewood, just in case. Back in '90 my folks were over for Christmas and we had that fireplace stoked up so hot it almost drove us out of the house. But, here I go again, preaching to the choir. How are your shelters coming along?"

"Done," both men answered in unison.

"Did you put up that Recreation Room sign like someone suggested?" Gary asked Ron.

"Yeah, if you see the guy, tell him thanks, will you?" Ron laughed. "That shelter is the best darned doghouse I've ever been in. And, when Kevin gets out and comes back home, I'll have somewhere to hide."

"I gots mine fitted out pretty nice too Gary," Clarence added. "Don't have no darned 42" big screen, but it's right comfortable. Got all of those supplies you recommended too. I decided to put in 3 of those 300-gallon home heating oil tanks and a diesel generator, but it ought to last us pretty good if we ever need to use it as a shelter."

"I did the same thing Gar-Bear," Ron said. "Figured we could always make that bio-

diesel stuff if push came to shove.”

The Three Amigos Part II – Revolution – Chapter 36 – Oops

“It is so cold,” the terrorist complained.

“Think of all of the Americans freezing in their homes, my brother, it will warm you,” Ali responded.

“I will never be warm again,” the man continued.

“Be still you fool,” Ali cautioned. “This attack worked out so much better than planned. Even our cousin didn’t expect the buildings to fall back in 2001. This is a great day for our cause.”

“We should move to a warmer climate here in America,” the man continued to complain. “Perhaps we could move to Los Angeles where it is warm and there are a lot of our brothers.”

“Perhaps,” Ali replied, “I will speak to our leader about moving the operation to the city called Pasadena in California. There are many of our brothers living in that area.”

Had Gary heard that conversation, he would have heartily agreed. Back in 1982, when the state of Iowa had moved him to Los Angeles, Gary ended up looking in the Pasadena area for an apartment. The apartments he looked at were teeming with people just sitting around. His friend, Paul, took one look at the group and told old Gar-Bear that he wouldn’t be caught dead living with any towel heads. Gary hadn’t been back to Pasadena since, except to the business district.

Not only were the crusades not over, the terrorists’ war against the US was beginning to heat up. Hambali realized that he ran a great risk having operations so closely together, but he also knew that eventually the US government would catch up to his operatives in America. Thus when Ali forwarded a message suggesting that the cell move to Pasadena, Hambali agreed. Perhaps, he thought, this will give them additional opportunities to strike at the Americans. California, after all, held about 10% of the population of the US.

It had taken the storm 6 days to abate to the point where the utilities were able to send out repair crews. In the interim, the automatic shutdown valves had prevented a significant loss of gas and fuel. Thousands of people had either frozen to death or taken ill as a result of the blackout and loss of heat. As soon as they were able, the four terrorists rented a Ryder truck, purportedly to move to San Diego, California. They loaded the explosives aboard the rental truck and loosely convoyed the vehicles to Pasadena. Once in the LA area, the men rented another storage locker, emptied and turned the vehicle in at a Ryder facility in San Diego. Without realizing it, they had spelled the doom of the terrorist cell.

In the weeks that followed the pipeline bombings, the size of the task force grew. Eventually, an ATF agent happened across a Ryder rental facility asking questions. He had

the composite drawings with him and the clerk said that he'd rented a truck to a college student who looked a little like both drawings, but not exactly like either. A forensic artist was brought in and using the clerk's memory and the two previous drawings, the artist and the clerk were able to construct yet a third drawing. When the artist was finished, the clerk announced, "That's your man!" The ATF took the new sketch back to the turn-in clerk in South Bend and after studying the new drawing, the clerk agreed that this new picture was closer than his original drawing. The third drawing was also faxed to the office that had originally rented the Hertz truck and the clerk there also agreed that the likeness was more correct.

There hadn't been any doubt from early on that the Hertz truck had been used to transport the explosives. Trained dogs had been brought in and their reaction had guaranteed that explosives had been present in the truck at one time or another. According to Ryder's records, the truck had indeed traveled to San Diego and had been turned in. The ATF ordered an immediate hold on the truck and dogs were brought in, once again, to confirm that the truck had been used to transport explosives. Interestingly, the mileage on the truck was almost exactly what it was expected to be, so apparently there had been no detours. However, when an FBI agent joined the ATF agent in the second interview with the turn-in clerk in San Diego, they learned that the Ryder mileage assumed that the renter passed through Los Angeles on his way to San Diego.

When this information was passed up the line, FBI and ATF agents began to flow into LA. Then, the feds had a stroke of luck. Someone wondered out loud where the terrorists would have stored the explosives and the general consensus was that they might have rented a storage locker. There are thousands of storage lockers in the greater LA area, but the agents realized that given the travel time and such, the men had probably rented a locker within a narrow time frame. They decided to begin checking locker rentals starting 3 days before the truck was turned in. It took dozens of agents hundreds of hours, to assemble a list of potential lockers. The noose was closing on Ali and his cell. It took another week before they hit pay dirt and a locker company employee recognized the 3rd drawing. The trained explosives dogs were brought in to check the locker from the outside and their reaction was immediate. The ATF contacted the LAPD bomb squad and the explosives were removed under great security. A couple of news organizations heard about the action at some storage locker company and tried to send reporters, but they were turned away several blocks from the business.

One of the news organizations then attempted to send its news helicopter to cover the location but the pilot was politely but firmly informed that the airspace in a two-mile radius of the site was closed. The pilot, somewhat of a local celebrity in his own right, wasn't about to disobey the FAA regardless of the urging of the newswoman aboard the helicopter. Consequently the news organizations could only report a mysterious police activity in a general area. Given the pressures of the news that day, only one station ended up carrying the story and the station was known to be owned by a Jewish family. Ali and his companions disliked the station because of the ownership and they never watched it.

The ATF and the FBI began a long-term stakeout of the storage locker. At the end of the month, when the locker rental came due (1/1/08), the facility received a postal money order in the mail to pay for the next month's rental. The agents were not deterred although they had hoped that someone would show up in person to pay the rent on the locker. Meanwhile, the ATF and FBI labs had confirmed that the explosives they had seized from the locker carried the same signature as the explosives used to destroy the pipelines. The money order was subjected to forensic analysis too, but it bore only the fingerprints of a post office employee and the clerk at the rental company.

Jakarta...

During mid-February, Hambali met yet again with the two bunglers.

"It is time for our next attack," Hambali said. "Our brothers in America remain undetected and we must move before the American law enforcement agencies discover something to lead them to our brothers. I have forwarded instructions to our leader in America to plan and make his next attack. This time, we shall attack another great American icon, the bridge in San Francisco called the Golden Gate."

"An admirable goal my brother," the first man spoke. "Do they not guard the bridge?"

"The bridge stands on 2 great piers, my brother, and the piers are not guarded," Hambali replied.

"When..." the second man began.

"Soon," Hambali replied.

Pasadena...

"We have our new mission my brothers and we shall need all of the explosives in storage," Ali said. "Rent a moving truck and meet me at the storage locker in 2 hours."

The two security types left to rent the truck and Ali and his fellow diver loaded their meager personal possessions aboard the van. When they had finished, they carefully wiped down the entire apartment with a towel wetted with a mixture of isopropyl alcohol and water. Two hours later both vehicles arrived at the storage locker within minutes of each other. Ali, who had the only key, and his fellow diver were the last to arrive. By this time the FBI had a SWAT team in place. The SWAT team had been on short notice and arrived just moments before Ali. They waited until Ali reached for the padlock to insert the key. Gottcha.

"This is the FBI! You are surrounded! Put your hands out from you bodies!"

The men were startled but only for the briefest of moments. They began to rush to the van where their weapons were stored. The FBI SWAT team snipers took all four men

down in a matter of seconds. The JI terrorist cell was dead.

Washington...

“Great news Mr. President,” Santorum said, “The FBI SWAT Team just took out that terrorist cell at the storage locker in Burbank.”

“No survivors?” the President asked.

“No Sir, they made a move for some weapons, apparently and SWAT just took them out.”

“Rick, can you keep a lid on this for say, 24-hours?” the President asked.

“Yes Sir, for as long as necessary, may I ask why?” Santorum inquired.

“The Law Enforcement Community in this country has taken a beating at the hands of the media ever since those 9/11/01 attacks,” the President explained. “I want you, Mueller, Goss and Truscott with me tomorrow when I hold a press conference to announce this thing. It’s about flippin’ time that the American public realized how much work goes in to solving one of these cases.”

“We did get a couple of lucky breaks, Mr. President,” Santorum pointed out.

“Hog wash. You make your own luck in this business. Think about it, this thing was resolved through good old fashioned police work and we didn’t need to violate anyone’s rights getting it done,” the President said. “There is nothing more valuable than experience in these cases. Now I know somebody probably made a lucky guess or two, but that’s what they call intuition and experience. 1:00pm tomorrow in the briefing room.”

“Yes Sir,” Santorum said a smile on his face.

White House Briefing Room...

“Ladies and Gentlemen, the President of the United States.”

I have a brief statement to make and then these gentlemen whom I’m sure you all recognize and I will take a few questions. At 11:20am yesterday morning in Burbank, California, the FBI’s SWAT Team killed the terrorists’ known to be responsible for the bombings of those pipelines the day after Thanksgiving and believed to be responsible for bombing and destroying Hoover Dam.

The President paused as a murmur arose in the room and those idiot reporters stood and applauded. He held up his hand to silence the reporters.

The ATF caught its first break in the case when someone identified an alleged college

student, purportedly Filipino, who rented a Hertz truck to transport the explosives stolen in that second explosives burglary. We ended up with two composite drawings of the renter, neither of which was totally accurate. Despite an extensive search, we were unable to locate this individual. A task force under the command of Director Mueller and including Secretary Santorum, Director Goss and Director Truscott conducted a massive search in the states of Michigan and Indiana.

After the second bombing we continued to follow up and identified another vehicle rental. This vehicle was headed for California. We used good old-fashioned police work to eventually locate the explosives in a storage locker in Burbank. The explosives were removed and surveillance was maintained on the locker. Yesterday morning, the terrorists finally showed up to retrieve their explosives and after a brief altercation were killed. At this time identification of the bodies is pending. We are absolutely certain that these are the individuals responsible for the pipeline bombings. Because of information available to us which I am unable at this time to discuss, we are 99% certain that these same individuals planted that bomb at Hoover Dam.

The United States has good law enforcement. Cases like these are very difficult to solve, especially when a foreign national blends in with other foreign nationals living in our country. The Directors and I will now accept a few questions.

The questioning lasted for about 30 minutes at which time the President departed. The Task Force members remained for another half hour answering questions, but never revealing that they had identified the terrorists as members of JI. You have to know what the main news was in the media for the next 3 days.

Palmdale...

"I sure as hell wish it had been us that caught those terrorists," Gary announced.

"What for, the FBI took them out?" Ron said.

"I wouldn't have minded having those explosives, though," Gary said.

"Yeah partner, but the feds picked those up a couple of months ago."

"I know, but you can never have enough explosives," Gary said. "We might have to fight another revolution next year if the Democrats get in the White House."

"Man, you really have it in for the Democrats," Clarence said, "What's that all about?"

"I don't know Clarence," Gary admitted. "I think maybe it goes back to the 2004 election. We never did really find out where anyone stood on anything. And the BS with Dan Rather and CBS really made me angry. Rather went to Nam and he was a pretty good reporter at one time. But he did that story on Bush's Guard service like maybe it was important and didn't even get his facts straight. I could have lived with that I suppose, but

then Kerry picked it up and ran with it for a while. Is there some kind of a law that says a politician has to be stupid? The Santorum guy seems pretty sharp and I've heard a lot of good things about him. Why can't they all be like that?"

"Politics make strange bedfellows Gar-Bear," Ron suggested.

"That much is sure," Gary said, "Not to speak ill of the dead but someone told me that Bill and Hillary met because they had the same taste in women."

"I never thought much of Boxer either, but her nuking the Middle East was refreshing," Gary continued. "And frankly, I don't really care what her motivation was either. Maybe it was because she was Jewish and maybe it was just because she wanted to do the right thing."

"Do you think the President will do anything to Indonesia?" Clarence asked.

"From what I've read, Indonesia is doing all they can to stop the terrorism, so I expect not," Gary opined. "Anybody check the sky lately? About all we need is for a comet to hit the earth."

"Just pray you're standing under it when it hits partner and it won't bother you one bit," Ron said.

The Three Amigos Part II – Revolution – Chapter 37 – Destination Unknown

*I see life and it's passin' right before my eyes
And the past is the past don't regret it, time to realize
I need to walk on the wire just to catch my breath,
I don't know how or where but I'm goin' it's all that I have left*

*It don't matter where it takes me
Long as I can keep this feeling runnin' through, my soul*

*Never took this road before -- destination unknown
Oh oh oh ohohoh -- destination unknown
Won't be coming back this way gotta go it alone
Oh oh oh ohohoh -- destination unknown*

*See a chance gotta take it wanna meet my fate
'Cause the last thing I ever wanted was to find out it's too late
No way out when you're in it deeper than the night
There's a light at the end of the tunnel and I see it burning bright*

*It don't matter where it takes me
Long as I can keep this feeling soarin' through, my soul*

*Never took this road before -- destination unknown
Oh oh oh ohohoh -- destination unknown
Won't be comin' back this way gotta go it alone
Oh oh oh ohohoh -- destination unknown*

One thing that Israelis did that Gary more or less agreed with was their terror campaign aimed right back at the terrorists. Unfortunately it got them a lot of bad press, especially from the liberal media. Probably the only reason that the Israelis hadn't killed Arafat was that it was guaranteed to start a war with their Arab neighbors. However, they no longer had any Arab neighbors so maybe they'd get off the dime. Everyone thought that God had said, Thou Shalt not Kill in the Bible, but the correct translation was Thou Shalt not Murder. Apparently Israel occasionally thought themselves above God's Law, but they had held their own since 1948 so who could really blame them. Rabin had been a man before his time, as had Sadat. And, it had gotten them both killed. That Sharon fella was just a whole lot too militant to suit Gary's tastes and every time CNN or any other media dropped the name Benjamin (Bibi) Netanyahu, Gary gave a silent prayer that it could be so. It had been his brother Jonathan who had been killed in the Raid on Entebbe, the sole Israeli military fatality. They used his nickname Yoni in the movie about the raid.

Babs must have warned the Israelis when she sent the B-2's because they escaped the carnage completely. Of course that meant that some of those Palestinian camps on the West Bank and in Gaza got a pass, but without all of those Arab neighbors to interfere, the Israelis seemed to be doing pretty good. About the only group in the world going

through leaders faster than the US was Hamas. Every time you looked, the Israelis were killing another Hamas leader. Man, those guys must be down to the janitor trying to stay in business. And Sharon had somehow managed to hang on, despite all of the criticism. Must have been the reason for his stroke.

The UN had changed the makeup of the Security Council and at the moment was pressing for Boxer to be tried for war crimes and genocide. There wasn't any genocide involved whatsoever. Those B-83's didn't check to see if you were a Christian, Muslim or Jew, they just exploded. Boxer had dropped so far from sight that she'd probably die of old age before they ever found her and charged her with war crimes anyway. And, she'd given Libya a pass because Libya was at least trying to clean up its act. On the political front, the Republicans were holding their own because of the President's decision to go to level orange over Thanksgiving. Only CNN wouldn't let it go, but that was par for CNN.

The 2008 political campaigns were in full swing now and that Rick Santorum fella had decided to make a bid for President. Santorum was well thought of in Pennsylvania, the Senate and the country in general. The President had let it be known that Santorum was behind raising the threat level over Thanksgiving and had given Santorum a strong endorsement. The Democratic Party didn't really have a good candidate for 2008, either. The Three Amigos couldn't put a finger on it but they were all in favor of Santorum becoming the next President. The guy had a good rep and had done a reasonable job as Secretary DHS. And, unlike 2004, this campaign was about the issues, not some 30-year-old war records. The economy had pulled itself out of the toilet and it was hard for anyone to make that an issue. And after an appropriate wait, DHS had identified the 4 terrorists as belonging to JI. Whoever was managing this campaign had his or her stuff together and Santorum was leading his Democratic opponent by a margin of over 2 to 1. Would the US be able to weather having a pro-gun, clear thinking man in the White House? A guy who didn't appear to have any agenda except rebuilding the country?

Palmdale...

"Man, they're really making progress on those dams," Gary observed. "According to FOX, they have all of the debris cleared and are ready to start construction. I didn't realize that Hoover was 660 feet thick at the base, I guess that I should have paid better attention to those programs on the Discovery Channel."

"Who are you going to vote for, Santorum?" Ron asked.

"Oh hell yeah, partner, although I'm not sure the country can handle having a guy like him in the White House," Gary replied.

"Why's that?" Clarence asked.

"Are you kidding Clarence?" Gary retorted, "This guy's a Republican who actually has a domestic agenda. That's almost an oxymoron. Putting in those desalinization plants is

going to really help the water situation in the long run, too. But, I guess that Arnold didn't have much of a choice, did he?"

"Sure he did Gar-Bear," Ron chuckled, "We could have blamed him for things beyond his control and recalled him just like we did Gray Davis."

"You know I voted to recall that Davis fella," Gary said, "But I sort of think in light of everything that came out he got a raw deal. Of course when California deregulated the utilities, they were asking for trouble. As much as I liked Ronald Reagan, I never quite agreed with all of the deregulation he pushed through. But do you know who I really blame for 90% of the troubles we have in this country? The Justice Department, that's who. They broke up Ma Bell and it's been going downhill ever since. And the funny thing is that MCI has the highest phone rates in the country."

During the last half of the 20th Century, America had undergone some fundamental changes. All of a sudden, everyone was his brother's keeper whether he wanted to be or not. It had started in the 1960's with the opposition to the war in Vietnam and just escalated. It really didn't matter if one was speaking of Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush Sr., Clinton or Bush Jr. and the others that followed. There had been fundamental changes in the American society. Guys like The Three Amigos and the Squirrels were now pretty much considered old fashioned and 'out-of-step' with the times. Never mind that all they believed was that the Constitution was the heart of America, the liberals were trying to rewrite the Constitution, a paragraph at a time. Gary often used his Constitutional Law book from college when he worked on his stories. The book, which was published in the late 1960's or early 1970's, stated that the 2nd Amendment wasn't important. Yeah right, neither was breathing unless you wanted to live.

The 2nd Amendment was, in Gary's mind, the thing that kept the Constitution working. It permitted an armed society and with an armed society, it was nigh on impossible for anyone to circumvent the Constitution and turn the country into a dictatorship. But, these days, people didn't do such a good job of raising their children at times and those spoiled brats seemed to think it was perfectly good thinking to take a gun to school and shoot up their classmates.

It only seemed to take a single individual or a small group of individuals to mess it up for everyone else. Someone had taken a weapon to a school in Stockton, California and by the time the dust settled and the bodies were counted, the citizens of California had lost a major portion of their rights to keep and bear arms. What in the hell difference did it make if a rifle had a bayonet lug, a pistol grip or a standard military flashhider? Most of that stuff was cosmetic anyway. Who the hell ran around with a bayonet? And a flashhider? Talk about a misnomer. The only real way to hide the flash on a rifle was to install a suppressor.

You could just about tell which states had the most repressive guns laws because they had the highest crime rates. They'd put you in jail in California for importing a 30 round magazine for your Mini-14. These liberals seemed to emphasize form over substance.

That guy who had shot Reagan had used a .22 handgun, not an AK-47 or an AR-15. And the argument that 'who needs a 30-round magazine to go deer hunting' was just so much fluff. Nobody needed, or for that matter probably used, a 30-round magazine for deer hunting. 30-round magazines were in the domain of the Assault Rifle and the Constitution didn't say the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed, except for blah, blah and blah.

What the US was experiencing was a resurgence of the roaring 20's where gangsters got their hands on the latest firepower, i.e., Thompson Sub machineguns, etc. The nation had overreacted to the 1929 St. Valentine's Day Massacre and it was doing it again 70 years later. And as the US moved from an agrarian society to an industrialized nation forcing people to congregate in cities, the liberals among society had an even greater say. As far back as Wyatt Earp the population was being disarmed. At least Earp didn't say you couldn't own a gun, just that you couldn't wear it in town. In some parts of the world, you just went down to the corner market and picked up your AK. In other parts of the 'more civilized' world, it was almost impossible to own a shotgun.

01Mar08...

"It sure is nice to have some peace and quiet for a change," Ron smiled.

"I agree Ron," Gary said, "And I've been taking some time to watch the election campaign coverage on TV. They are actually running a civilized campaign. It sure is refreshing to see the candidates discussing what they'd like to accomplish in the next 4 years. I just don't know what's happened to the Democratic Party. They used to be pretty reasonable even though they were liberal. But man, this candidate of theirs is proposing a total ban on firearms. He claims that no one hunts for food anymore and that firearms are relics from a bygone era. Claims that they all belong in museums."

"Has Santorum countered his claim?" Clarence asked.

"Yeah, he pointed out that the more restrictive the gun laws, the worse the crime rate. But I'll tell you something; since all of those terrorist attacks, the mood of the country has changed. A whole lot of people must feel like they've been mugged." Gary reported.

Several of the anti-gun organizations had banded together under the leadership of Sarah Brady. Her husband had been shot in the assassination attempt on Ronald Reagan and survived but was permanently injured. She had made it her life's work to try and ban handguns and eventually had gotten the Brady Bill passed. The Brady Bill provided for the instant background check. Yeah right, instant as in 5 day waiting period. Did anyone really believe that making someone wait 5 days to acquire a firearm would accomplish anything? Had John Hinckley purchased his handgun the morning of the shooting? Nope, maybe 4 months earlier to replace his guns seized at an airport while he was stalking President Carter.

Anyway, the new organization of anti-gun groups was throwing its full support to the

Democratic candidate. And as in the case of the pro-lifers, the new organization had within its ranks militancy. That was quite the contradiction, but what can I say. The militant pro-lifers killed doctors who performed abortions and there was some talk among the militant anti-gun folks that what gun-loving Americans needed was a dose of their own medicine. Never say never, because never is a darned long time.

Things were changing around Palmdale, too. A couple of Hispanics gangsters had stolen a car and tried to run it through the storefront of Sandy's gun store. They didn't penetrate the steel cage until the third try and by that time the Sheriff's Department had responded and arrested them on the spot. (really) Johnny Jones had been promoted to Lieutenant with the Sheriff's Department. Everyone was getting accustomed to having two hospitals in town, too. The Citadel had been forced to sell energy to Edison well into the winter, stopping only around the 24th of February when a new power plant went online in Kern County. Damon had a job working with an insulation company, the same as he had in Iowa before he came to California and Derek was now the assistant manager of an auto parts store. Chris was working on a new show because ET had finally dropped him. And, Gary was getting pretty tired of living in the hospital basement. Gary and Sharon had managed to accumulate a fair amount of money between his various sources of income and the in kind payments from the Citadel.

"Let's build a new house and get out of the hospital," Sharon suggested.

"Why?" Gary asked, "You sure can't beat the rent we pay for this apartment."

"I suppose it's ok if you like living in a dungeon," Sharon said, "Don't you want to take the money we've saved up and build your own house with a bomb shelter and all of that?" Boy, did that woman know which buttons to push.

"Do you think we have enough money saved up to do that honey?" Gary asked.

"If we don't, I will after I collect on your life insurance," Sharon THOUGHT.

"I think so dear," Sharon said.

"But you know how I want to build a new house with a basement under the basement and all of that," Gary said, "Are you sure?"

"Just get off the dime, dang it," Sharon THOUGHT.

"Yes, I'm sure," she replied.

"Well, but we're going to need someone to design the home for us," Gary agreed.

"No we don't, dear," Sharon said, "Just take one of those 50 or 60 blueprints you've drawn and get an engineer to look it over."

“I knew she’d come around,” Gary THOUGHT.

The truth was they both wanted out of the cellar and in their own home. While the apartment had its advantages, the sun never shined and they were both tired of that. Gary had even written about his ‘perfect’ home in one of his stories. It had a sub-basement shelter and a basement for a family room. That way they could keep the main floor spotless and never had to be embarrassed if unexpected company showed up. House cleaning wasn’t one of Sharon’s strong suits and Gary was hardly any better. He finally learned not to leave dirty socks laying all over the house and put trash in the trash cans, but that was the limit of his being domesticated. And to be perfectly honest, Gary wasn’t getting any stronger. Since that last hospital stay, he’d recovered to a point and then had sort of leveled off. His blood sugar and blood pressure were well managed and he had a Nebulizer plus oxygen for sleeping, but he never fully regained his strength. It seemed like every time Gary got sick, he lost a little ground. Maybe that just went with growing old.

The Three Amigos Part II – Revolution – Chapter 38 – The New House

Over the years, Gar-Bear had designed several dozen homes. It was sort of a hobby of his when he was bored with everything else. The latest design was for a 40'x80' one-story mansion. Both ends of the home had a huge bedroom suite and they were mirror images of each other. Each included a full bathroom, walk-in closet and huge bedroom. Gary had even drawn in the furniture to make sure the plans worked. The bedroom suites were 24' wide for a total of 48' leaving a 40' deep by 32' wide area. This he divided front and back. The front half was a living room with a couple of those conversation pits and the back half was divided up among the dining room, kitchen and a laundry room. In front of the laundry room was a powder room for guests. This was his best plan and because it contained so few corners, the cost of building the plan was deceptive. What gave every appearance of being a \$300 thousand house in Palmdale could be built for \$200 thousand.

Gary intended to spend the full \$300,000, but a lot of that would be hidden from view. The sub-basement would have 2' thick reinforced concrete walls, floor and ceiling. It would contain a second 2' thick wall with a blast door separating it from a stairwell down from the basement. The steel staircase would be accessible from the basement through a secret panel. He had used this set up in one of his previous stories where the 3-amigos moved to Holbrook. The difference was that now he could build it for real. He had decided that Ron and Clarence had a point about using a diesel generator and intended to put in a Cummins power 40kw model DGBC 60 Hz generator. That would allow him to go all-electric. He intended to look around and find a large, used fuel tank for diesel fuel. At 100% power, the generator would burn ~ 25,400 gallons per year. He had a source for the blast door and the air filtration system. He'd learned writing his stories that the best solution to the waste problem was to use a sewage pump.

Gary had also figured out from his stories that the generator ought to go in the stair well. That meant a second blast door at the top of the stairs, but it was worth avoiding carbon monoxide poisoning in case the exhaust system developed a leak. He didn't really intend to make the shelter too fancy. He'd get his radios from the old shelter for the comm. room and get Derek to help him move the antennas. The gun safe was more than adequate for his selection of weapons and he could put it in the storeroom with all of the ammo and other weapons. Their previous experience had shown Gary that they needed to avoid overcrowding at all costs. That had been a miserable two weeks with 24 of them in a 6-person shelter. Since the 11/12/05 event, they'd done a lot of experimenting with vacuum bag sealers and various ways to store food for extended periods. He opted for a 25ft³ chest freezer and a smaller upright upstairs. He also opted for a refrigerator without a freezer because the combination unit wasted space. He decided on a 6-burner electric cook top, realizing it was over kill, but a burner didn't use electricity unless you turned it on. To round out the kitchen appliances, he added an electric deep fat fryer, Kitchen aide industrial mixer and assorted small appliances like a can opener/knife sharpener, etc.

They had that bed they bought when they moved to the hospital so he decided to put it

in the shelter and buy 2 identical new beds for the bedroom suites on the main floor. The furniture store had some really nice solid oak furniture and since they were partial to oak, they went with two identical sets. The old bedroom furniture went with the old bed to the shelter.

Upstairs he would have preferred gas appliances, but he was going all-electric so he essentially duplicated what he chosen for the shelter. When it came time to put in a washer and dryer, he got Sharon those fancy Maytag units she wanted for upstairs and something far more modest for the shelter. Once he had the appliances all contracted for, Gary met again with the engineer so that the engineer could make any necessary changes before construction actually began. They had about \$250,000 of the \$300,000 needed for the project. But, that was going to cut them awfully tight on cash so they arranged a bank loan of \$100,000 and held on to the extra \$50k. Gary knew from his previous experience that there'd be a dozen things he'd overlooked and wanted a little flexibility.

In terms of the main floor construction of the actual home, Gary wanted to do a few unusual things. For example, he wanted Kevlar in the walls and some really heavy duty rolled steel shutters so they could button up the house tight. The home itself would use the "Farnsworth" construction method with masonry walls lined with a 2x6 core and the foam plus fiberglass insulation. When it came time to select the windows Gary ran into his first major problem. It seemed than no one made the high e-rated windows in bullet-proof glass. That's right, bulletproof glass. He suggested that the engineer had better find them somewhere. The engineer contacted Pella Roll Screen and special ordered the windows, and they weren't cheap. That left them with the doors to secure. The expensive windows forced them to go with hot rolled $\frac{3}{4}$ " plate as an outer security shutter.

The masonry walls could be of any construction and Gary decided that 12" of reinforced concrete was an excellent idea. And, every little change he made to the project added to the cost. In the end, they would have needed a bank loan anyway, so both Gary and Sharon were happy that they decided to borrow the \$100k.

It took a little over two months to construct the home and Gary was there every day following the progress. The engineer had suggested that they put a layer of stucco over the concrete but Sharon wanted zero maintenance vinyl siding. When it was finally done, the house was impressive. And most of the better features of the home weren't even visible, like the Kevlar wall lining and that sub-basement shelter. Of course the home stuck out like a sore thumb with that vinyl siding; most homes in Palmdale were stucco. But, they'd built the home a bit off the beaten path and with any kind of luck it would be years before they had to contend with having neighbors.

With all of the durable medical equipment Gary had accumulated he could pretty well equip a small first aid room in the shelter. But he used that equipment on a daily basis, his side of the bed looked like a hospital room, so he decided to just move the stuff if the need arose. The outer doors ended up being $\frac{3}{4}$ " hot rolled steel plate, like the shutters. They were sectioned and connected with heavy-duty piano type hinges. It was strictly a

manual affair, requiring old Gar-Bear to walk the house and close the shutters. Sharon followed along inside of the home dropping the bars into the brackets, firmly locking the shutters closed. They'd made a couple of trial runs just to see how long it would take and that turned out to be a good thing. Although it looked like an easy task, it actually required a little practice to make the operation run smoothly. Their best time was 9 minutes to button up.

Gary promised to do a better job picking up after himself and said he'd try to help getting the trash out. Sharon said she'd do a better job of keeping the house picked up. Then they laughed at each other and called Ginger's Maids and arranged for them to come clean the house once a week.

When the electricians had wired the house, Gary had them wire in multiple category 6 Ethernet outlets in each room. They had also wired in multiple telephone and CATV outlets. Years of never being able to move furniture around because of a single TV outlet, etc. had suggested to Gary that the easiest way to deal with his frustration was to plan ahead and pay for the extra outlets. The electricians put a double box on one side of a stud and a duplex on the other. The double box had a CATV connector, a phone outlet, a cat 6 outlet and one reserved space. The duplex had the top half switched and the bottom half hot. The real secret lay in the fact that despite the electricians' objections, Gary had a pair of boxes every 6'. Of course, the electricians hadn't objected too strenuously, they charged \$50 a box for a duplex and \$75 a box for the double boxes.

The cat 6 cables were all terminated in a patch panel in the Family Room basement. The patch panel was mounted in one of those equipment racks and it also contained a synchronous DSL connection through a router, a 24 position gigabit Ethernet switch, a firewall and a true UPS. His monster half-tower computer that he used at the hospital was converted to a server and for the first time, Gary had a true network with a file server. He bought a new Dell computer slightly less powerful than his server. Gary contracted with a local firm for a maintenance contract to keep his network up. Everything he knew about networks could be written on the head of a pin. And, with the T-1 connection Gar-Bear had 1.5mb upload and download and he could hardly tell the difference from being hooked into the network at the hospital.

Late Spring, 2008...

Linda's father had passed early in the year and the estate had finally settled. True to his word, Ron and Lyn had placed their house on the market. They had long planned to sell their home and move to New Mexico so Ron could be near his brother Robert and quite honestly had been waiting for Linda's father to die and for her to receive her inheritance. They old guy was in his 90's and had cancer, among other things. God, how Gary hated to see The Three Amigos break up. The altitude where Robert lived was 6,200'. Gary was pretty certain Ron was signing his death warrant making the move but he kept his mouth shut. Ron, like Gary, had COPD and Ron, unlike Gary, had major heart problems. It was just a matter of time, in Gary's opinion, before Ron dropped dead. Their home sold quickly and it seemed as if in an instant they were gone. But there was still

his amigo Clarence who the next time he saw him announced that Lucy and he were moving back to Alabama. And, in another blink of an eye, they were gone, too. But, life is like that, isn't it?

The Three Amigos Part III – The Three Amigos Ride Again – Chapter 39 – Old Friends

God, how Gary missed Ron and Clarence. They'd had a pretty good run as The Three Amigos, dating all of the way back to 1992 when Gary had met Ron at a RAFT meeting. There had been a couple of gaps in their friendship, like from 92 to 95 when Gary wasn't ready to accept his alcoholism and then again in the 97 to 99 period when Gary had gone through that thing with divorcing Sharon to chase the 'bimbos'. Apparently old Ronald McDonald had assumed that Gary would figure it out sooner or later and get his act together. The only real surprise had come when Sharon had accepted Gary back and they'd remarried. Gary seemed to have some sort of natural born luck, it was a shame he wasn't a gambler. Gary didn't gamble because he found it to be as addictive as the booze and how many vices could one person manage?

And now they were gone; their nice homes with the bomb shelters owned by someone else. Surprisingly, the bomb shelters had returned more than their cost when the homes were sold. Gary didn't know for certain, but he sort of speculated that a couple of survival-oriented families had purchased the homes. Damon had been promoted to a lead worker position and seemed to really enjoy working for the insulation company. Derek had been advanced to store manager at another of his company's stores, this one in Lancaster.

Santorum had won the election handily, the margin was large enough that the media called it a landslide, and the country was continuing the recovery from all of that terrorist business. First there had been the 30 suitcase nukes and the 182 dirty bombs. Then, they'd had to contend with the UN for a while. Finally some Indonesian terrorists had blown Hoover Dam and the resulting flood had taken out the 4 downstream dams. And finally, those same terrorists had hit several American pipelines the days after Thanksgiving 2007.

In the meantime, the B & M G Foundation had decided to get into a new venture, charity hospitals, and their first project had been to build the Citadel right there in Palmdale. The Three Amigos had been hired to supervise construction of the place and they'd built a combination Hospital/Bomb Shelter that was totally energy independent. It was the only 'public' building in Palmdale that truly qualified as a bomb shelter. Gary and Sharon had even lived in the place for a while until it began to depress them. After that, they built a nice 'Dream Home' out in the boonies a ways and that place was a veritable fortress.

They rarely used the main floor of the home except to sleep and do laundry. The basement was subdivided into an area for Gary's computer set up/office and a large portion for Sharon's quilting room. They called the basement their Recreation Room and spent most of their time there doing one thing or another. They didn't even use the dining room upstairs. There was a small table with 2 chairs and a bench stuck in one corner of the kitchen and they just took their meals there when they ate at home. Gary was still technically on the Board at the Citadel and was entitled to 'in kind' compensation in the

form of meals and free medical services. So when they went out to eat, they invariably ended up eating at the Hospital Cafeteria.

Gary couldn't go near the hospital without thinking about his amigos, Ron and Clarence and eventually they cut their eating out to about 4 meals a year. Those were always trips to Outback where they could get a good steak. A full year, and perhaps a bit more, had passed since Ron and Clarence had left. There had been some phone calls at first from New Mexico and Alabama but they had sort of dried up. Gary had even gone back to the DMV and reapplied for a driver's license. He ended up being required to get a note from Dr. J, taking the written and driving tests, but eventually acquired a restricted driver's license. The restriction was that Gary had to resubmit a medical compliance certificate annually.

This gave Gary the ability to make the occasional AA meeting, but he almost hated going because everyone was always asking him about Ron and Clarence. But, alcoholics who recover through AA had made a long-term commitment to attend the AA meetings. It kept their perspective fresh and reminded them what it used to be like. The single greatest risk a recovering alcoholic ran was getting over confident and stopping meetings. Every once in a while, some 'old timer' would go out, e.g., get drunk, fall off the wagon, or any of a hundred things you could call it. The problem with that was that he or she picked up right where he or she had left off.

Recent studies seemed to indicate that the genetic aspect of alcoholism was that a defective gene allowed the brain to metabolize alcohol in addition to the liver metabolizing alcohol. When that occurred the resultant Tetra Hydro Iso Quilines, aka THQ's or THIQ's were stored in the brain. The THQ's had the quality of being an endorphin like substance and the body never removed them from the brain. Endorphins produce a pleasurable effect. They were activated when the alcoholic consumed more booze and produced some new THQ's. That explained why an alcoholic picked up his or her drinking right where they'd left off. Gary needed that reminder that even 'old timers' could get right back into their disease.

Gary decided to catch a 9:30am Wednesday meeting. He steeled himself for the inevitable questions about Ron and Clarence and headed out. When he pulled into the parking lot he happened to notice a car that looked a lot like Clarence's but attributed it to coincidence. But he almost had a heart attack when he walked into the room and his amigo Clarence was sitting there. There was a lot of hand shaking and hugging in the minutes that followed. Gary sort of figured that Clarence would share during the participation meeting so he didn't badger Clarence with a lot of questions.

"My name is Clarence and I'm an alcoholic," Clarence began when he raised his hand to share. "My Lucy and I moved back to Alabama about a year or so back. There is some famous saying about *you can never go home* and that sure turned out to be the case with us. We're old enough that most of our friends have died off or moved away and it was like being in a strange land. I got some relatives there but after a while even their company got old. We never got around to buying a home either. Anyway, we

talked it over and decided to move back to Palmdale. We left most of our stuff in storage to be delivered when we got a home, so most of our stuff never left town.”

Clarence went on to share some of his other experiences, and then several other people shared. As typically happens Clarence’s sharing had created a topic and everyone who shared related similar stories about moves gone wrong, etc. After the meeting Gary asked Clarence if he could buy him lunch, he really wanted to visit with his friend. Clarence wanted to visit with Gary just as about as badly, so they headed to the Country Café.

“Wow! I haven’t been in this place since the Tony days,” Gary observed after they placed their orders.

“You ever hear any more from that SOB?” Clarence asked; Tony had taken Clarence for a pile of money too.

“Nope, I’m just hoping that he got his when they nuked LA,” Gary said. “So it didn’t work out going back to Alabama, huh?”

“Well Gary, it was like I said in the meeting, most of Lucy and my friends were gone; you know died or had moved on,” Clarence began to explain. “Spent some time with my kids that live back there, but they have lives of their own now. The other relatives, well, you can only find so much to visit about. After a while I sort felt out of place. Lucy and I talked it over and realized that most of our current friends, plus my sister, are here in Palmdale, so we just got in the car and headed home. Places change, people change and the times change. It just wasn’t home and Palmdale is.”

The waitress dropped off their lunches and they continued to visit.

“So, what have you been doing to keep busy?” Clarence asked.

“Well partner,” Gary said, “I finally got off my dead butt and got my driver’s license back so I could get around a little better,” Gary explained. “Sharon said she was willing to take me to meetings, but it seemed to inconvenience her quite a bit. Say, where are you and Lucy staying?”

“Lucy is at my sister’s at the moment,” Clarence said, “I expect we’ll get a motel until we can find another home.” (Clarence’s sister has the cleanest apartment I’ve ever been in.)

“You’ll do no such thing,” Gary said, “You know that the dream house we built has 2 complete master suites. You and Lucy are going to stay with us.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t want to impose, Gary,” Clarence said.

“You wouldn’t be, man,” Gary insisted. “We have never even had occasion to use our

dining room. Besides, housing is pretty tight at the moment and I have an idea that I'd like to run by you."

They finished their lunch making small talk and Clarence said he'd pick up Lucy and be by the house in about an hour. Gary went straight home and helped Sharon make up the bed in the second master suite. They never even bothered to make up the bed before; they'd just put on the bedspread for appearances. Even the sheets were new and still contained the sizing. Clarence had either never heard of Lombardi time or didn't much pay attention to it, Lucy and he didn't arrive until about an hour and a half after they left the restaurant. Sharon and Lucy were glad to see each other and the 2 amigos unloaded the car into the second master suite. They sat down for a cup of coffee and after, Gary gave Clarence the grand tour while Sharon showed Lucy the upstairs and her quilting area.

Clarence was a bit surprised at some of the things Gary had done. Plate steel shutters for the windows and doors on the main floor, outlets for TV, phone, and computer everywhere you looked and even Kevlar in the walls behind a foot of reinforced concrete. Gary took Clarence to the basement and proudly showed off his network setup. Clarence, by this time, was simply shaking his head. Gary picked up a Stanley garage door opener and pointed it towards a blank wall. The wall slowly rotated open to reveal a blast door.

"This is where it gets good, partner," Gary told Clarence, "Check this out."

There was a set of stairs going down. They descended to the foot of the stairs and Gary pointed out the diesel-powered generator under the stairs. He told Clarence that it was a 35kw prime, 40kw standby generator and that he'd put in a used 40,000-gallon fuel tank and had just recently finished filling it. The fuel, he said, was all stabilized with PRI-D. Clarence knew about Gary's plans for the shelter. Gary spun the wheel and opened the blast door, revealing a second blast door, which he opened and they entered the shelter.

Man what a sight that was. This sure wasn't any cramped little shelter. Immediately to the left of the door as you entered was a lounge area with tables to seat maybe 24 people and a 27" TV. To the right of the door was a kitchen area with cafeteria type serving. Further on to the right was a small room with a sign on the door saying COMM Shack, and behind it was what turned out to be a bedroom. On the left side of the shelter, across from the COMM Shack and Bedroom, were 2 more bedrooms, just a shade smaller than the one on the right. At the end of the hallway, a door opened into a large storage room. Off to the left, there was a small area that looked a lot like an examining room in a doctor's office. To the right of that sat a gun safe. The remainder of the storage room contained a large chest freezer and shelving filled nearly to overflowing with food and supplies.

"Man, this ain't nothing like that little shelter you worked so hard to build in your backyard," Clarence said.

“I was never going to go through an experience like that again, Clarence,” Gary observed. “In a pinch, this shelter can handle the same 24 people, but without making you feel like you’re in a closet. Since our kids can all ride one out in the first shelter I built or at the Citadel, I don’t expect that we’d ever have more than a dozen people in a TSHTF scenario.”

“So what’s this idea you had?” Clarence asked.

“I ended up buying 2½ acres to get the land for this place,” Gary explained. “Being out in the country like it is, I had to put in a septic system and a well. You know how I operate pal; I put in a septic system big enough to handle five homes this size, hell, maybe even 6. I don’t know if you noticed but the southern roof of this house is covered by those solar panels and I built a 6 stall detached garage out back with solar panels on its roof too. Put in a 6” well because it just didn’t cost that much more than a regular well. Right now, we’re running on a small 1,000-gallon water tank, but I was planning to upgrade that as soon as more homes were built on this site. I’ll give you a ½ acre lot if you’ll agree to build a new home out here next to us.”

“Gee, I don’t know,” Clarence replied. “From the looks of things you must have spent a half million dollars on this place.”

“Clarence, the house and basement came in at a cool \$200 grand,” Gary smiled, “Altogether I only have \$300 grand in the place including the shelter and that detached garage. We were about 50 grand short for the project, so I borrowed 100 grand and kept the 50 we had to supply the shelter. Of course it didn’t run near that so I actually have money in the bank and am ahead in paying off the 100 grand loan. For about \$200 thousand, Lucy and you could put in a home just like ours and we could connect it from your basement to that stairwell with a tunnel. Doesn’t make much sense to me to have a shelter under every home.”

“I don’t know what to think Gary,” Clarence said, “But I’ll talk it over with Lucy and see what she thinks.”

“Fair enough, how’s steak sound for supper?” Gary asked.

“Sounds good to me Gar-Bear,” Clarence replied.

Gary pulled 4 individually wrapped New York strips from the freezer and they headed upstairs, locking up behind themselves. Darn, that felt good, no one had called him Gar-Bear in over a year. Gary sat the steaks on the kitchen counter to thaw and checked their supply of potatoes. They needed to make a grocery run for potatoes and some mushrooms to go with the steaks so Gary asked Sharon if she minded running to Albertsons. Sharon had seen Gary carrying the steaks to the kitchen and she was already getting her jacket on and had her purse, so that went well. And oh, she just remembered, Ron had called and wanted Gary to call him back.

“Let’s go down to my office so we can use the speaker phone.” Gary suggested to Clarence.

The Three Amigos Part III – The Three Amigos Ride Again – Chapter 40 – Old Friends 2

Gary sorted through a pile of papers and finally went to his Windows address book. Gary was one of those people who kept everything important on his computer. He found the number, picked up the handset and dialed the number. Lynda answered, as always, and they visited a few minutes. Gary asked to speak to Ronald and she told him Ron was bedridden but that she'd take the portable phone to him.

"Ron Green," Ron answered. Gary could hear the weakness in Ron's voice.

"Hey uglier than me, how's it hanging?" Gary asked.

"Is that you Gar-Bear? Ron replied.

"Yeah, it's me and I have someone here with me who wants to speak to you so I'm putting this on the speaker phone," Gary explained.

"Can you hear us okay Ron," Gary asked after pushing the speaker button.

"Clear as a bell you old fart, what's up?" Ron asked.

"I'm just returning your call," Gary said.

"I didn't call you, that must have been Lyn," Ron protested.

"Hello Ron," Clarence said.

"Is that you Clarence?" Ron asked, "Gar-Bear said you moved to Alabama."

"Ron, it didn't work out and we moved back to Palmdale," Clarence explained. "How are you doing?"

"To be perfectly honest fellas, not worth a crap," Ron announced.

"My sister in law died about 4 weeks ago, Robert was taking it pretty badly and at the Cemetery he had a major heart attack. They transported him by air ambulance to Albuquerque, but he died 5 days later," Ron explained.

"Ron I'm really sorry for your loss, but you don't sound so darned hot yourself," Gary boldly stated.

"Well, I picked up a cold, Gar-Bear but it should be ok," Ron said.

"Bullcrap," Gary remarked strongly, "Put Linda back on the phone, I'll talk to you later."

“Yes Gary?” Linda asked.

“Ron had a lot of shortness of breath since you moved to New Mexico?” Gary asked.

“Well, yes,” Linda replied, “But he seems to be acclimating.”

“I’m going to be straight with you Linda,” Gary said “If you don’t get that crusty old husband of yours on an air ambulance and fly him to the Citadel, he’s going to be dead in weeks, perhaps even days. You remember back in 2001 when my dad died don’t you?”

“Well yes,” Linda replied. “What’s that got to do with anything?”

“My dad had congestive heart failure the same as Ron and he caught cold,” Gary reminded Linda. “He spent 7 weeks in the Mayo Clinic in Rochester and died anyway. I’m no medical expert, but the Citadel is the best hospital in Palmdale and maybe even in California. Now are you going to fly him here or do I have to charter an air ambulance and come after him? I’m not going to lose one of my best friends to a common cold.”

“Well, all right, but I think that you’re definitely over reacting,” Linda reluctantly agreed.

“Look, I’ll have the Citadel contact an air ambulance for you,” Gary suggested, “Where’s the nearest one to where you live?”

“I think the nearest one with the kind of range it would take to get to Palmdale might be in Albuquerque,” Linda said, “I’m not sure.”

“You throw some clothes together and get someone to pick up your animals to board them,” Gary said, “The ambulance is on the way. I’ll talk to you later.”

Gary dialed the Citadel and identified himself. He told the operator that this was a medical emergency and that he needed to talk to Dr. E stat. For the one time since that whole Citadel thing had come up, Gary began to really throw his weight around. Dr. E was on the phone in about 4 minutes and Gary carefully recounted the situation with Ronald, putting extra emphasizes where he thought it necessary. Dr. E had been Ron’s cardiologist since 1992 and he didn’t really need to see Ron’s file to remember Ron Green. And apparently his professional assessment, based on the limited information Gary was giving him was enough that he agreed with Gary. Dr. E said he’d get someone to immediately order an air ambulance out of Albuquerque to transport Ron to the Citadel. Gary asked Dr. E to instruct the ambulance crew to allow Linda to ride along and the Dr. agreed.

Kevin was due to be released from prison any day now, but Kevin was as useless as teats on a boar. Gary tracked down John, who was working security at the Citadel and filled him in. Jennifer and her family plus Brenda and her husband had since moved back to Ft. Smith and Gary got their numbers from John. He then put in a call to Jennifer and filled her in. Jennifer told him that they wanted to come, but money was just a

little tight. Gary told Jennifer that she should make reservations on the next flight out and call him back with the details and he'd pay for the tickets. Gary knew in his heart that were the situations reversed, his best friend Ronald would do the same for him, if he could.

Linda called and said the air ambulance was there and that they'd be airborne in a few minutes. Ron, she said, wasn't doing so hot either. Gary told her that Jennifer and Brenda were on the way, too. Some people seem to work best under pressure and this was definitely a high-pressure situation. Gary hadn't felt so alive in years and he was making things happen. He arranged for Mary, Derek's wife, to pick up Jennifer and Brenda at LAX and stopped to take a breather. Clarence just sat there awestruck, he had never seen Gary operate when he was at his best.

The hospital called sometime later indicating that the air ambulance from New Mexico was inbound. They'd had to stop to refuel, but should be at the hospital within 30 minutes. Gary reached into his desk drawer and pulled out his Hospital ID tag along with Clarence's. Gary had kept both Ron and Clarence's ID's when they resigned from the board. Then Gary put in another stat call to Dr. Shankar and filled him in on what was going down. Shankar had treated Ron for his OSA and was familiar with Ron's history. By the time Gary and Clarence finally got to the hospital, the helicopter was sitting on the pad. The two amigos went straight to the emergency room but stayed back out of the way and observed. Dr. E had Ron wired for sound and was closely monitoring Ron's cardiac condition. Dr. S had ordered Ron placed in an induced coma and they were using a respirator on him. The doctors seemed to have everything well in hand and after a bit, the two of them came over and talked to Gary and Clarence.

"How did you know?" Dr. E asked, "This was a close call."

"Dr. E, I had no idea, but back in 2001 my Dad died after being in Mayo Clinic with the same sort of situation," Gary explained. "I just assumed a worst case scenario and put the balls in motion."

"Your friend," Dr. S explained, "Has some pneumonia and his lungs are slightly enlarged. What's the altitude where they live now?"

"I understand that it's about 6,200 feet," Gary replied. "Is he going to be alright?"

Dr. E took the lead. "If my colleague here can get his lungs cleared up it doesn't appear that there has been any significant damage to his heart, so my best guess is that he'll be ok."

"Dr. S, do you remember how much trouble you had with me back when I was admitted to AV a while back?" Gary asked.

"Do I ever," Shankar chuckled.

“Listen, I don’t mean to stick my nose where it doesn’t belong (like hell),” Gary said, “But I believe that you’ll find Ron to be an even more difficult patient than I was. You might want to consider keeping him under like you did me, until he is completely off that respirator. Compared to old Ron, I’m laid back.” Most everyone remembered Gary’s last stay in AV hospital. Sharon had suggested strongly that they keep Gary under for as long as possible because once he was awake, he was the most bull-headed, strongest-willed individual that they had probably ever encountered. They hadn’t listened and had learned for themselves that Sharon had a gift for understatement.

Linda had her nose pressed against the glass watching everything they did to Ron. When it finally seemed apparent that they had Ron stabilized she turned around and saw Gary and Clarence standing there visiting with Dr. E and Dr. S. Linda looked totally exhausted and Gary suggested that she come home with Clarence and him and get some rest. Ron’s prognosis was good, he told her, and she wouldn’t help anything by getting sick herself. Besides he said, Jennifer and Brenda should be at the house in about an hour or two.

Then, before they left the hospital, Gary called the furniture dealer. He explained that he had a bit of an emergency and needed a couple of those adjustable beds and those Swedish mattresses. Was there any chance, he asked, that they had any in stock. They did, they told him, but it would be a couple of days before they could deliver them. Operating under pressure, Gary never took no for an answer. He told the furniture store that he didn’t care how they managed it but that he wanted those beds and mattresses at his home in 2 hours. He’d pay extra or pay for an outside delivery company to deliver them, if necessary. It wasn’t that Gary and Sharon were such good customers as it was that every stick of furniture in every home they lived in had come from that same furniture store since 1987. The furniture store said they’d make it happen, somehow, but wanted to know how Gary intended to pay for the stuff. Gary told them he’d be in the next day and pay cash and that he’d need a couple of nice oak bedroom suites to go with the beds. They told him they’d figure it all out and have the beds there within 2 hours.

Gary Olsen wasn’t exactly what you’d call a people person. But 19 years of being a tax auditor for the state of Iowa had taught him how to work with (manipulate) people. When he made his mind up that he wanted something, it happened 95% of the time. The other 5% of the time, he made the people’s lives so miserable that he eventually got what he wanted. He didn’t do that very often, you understand, but when he got on a roll, the only smart thing to do was get out of his way. Back when he still worked for Iowa, the standing joke was, “If all else fails, we’ll send in Gary, he gets what we want.” Gary did not have a type A personality. He was soft spoken and never pressed. Neither did he give up once he had his mind made up. “His greatest line was, “I may just be a dumb old farm boy from Iowa, but...” And, anybody who knew Gary knew that when that line came from his lips, he was about to cut the listener off at the knees.

Old Gar-Bear wasn’t the sharpest tack in the box, but he was a deep thinker. People often temporarily put one past him in the heat of a conversation, or so it appeared. But

Gary just sat there and chewed it over in his mind, waiting for an opening. Gary had another aspect to his personality that most people never saw, or if they did, didn't recognize. Gary had a passive-aggressive personality. The best way to describe a passive-aggressive personality is with the statement, "I don't get mad, I just get even." And, I'm here to tell you that Gary had refined the getting even part to a fine art. Even with a short-term memory loss problem, that part of Gary's brain that controlled the passive-aggressive portion of his personality worked just fine.

By the time they finally got Linda to agree to go to the house and actually made it there, the furniture truck was unloading the beds and frames. Gary wasn't about to let those delivery guys get an eyeball on his shelter so he told them to drop the stuff in the basement and he'd take it from there. The delivery guy was a member of the family that owned the furniture store and he commented that the store had two identical bedroom suites to what Gary had put in his master bedrooms. Gary told the guy to have them write them up and deliver them tomorrow. He'd make a run to Lancaster and pay for the entire purchase. Originally Gary had planned to suggest that Clarence and Lucy and Ron and Linda provide their own bedroom furniture for the shelter, but circumstances had changed those plans in a hurry.

Gary called Derek and Damon and asked them stop by the house after work and lug the new beds and frames to the shelter and set them up. About that time, Mary showed up with Jennifer and Brenda in tow. Sharon and he had plenty of Eastern King sized sheet sets, still new in their wrappers. Sharon and Lucy made the beds and they now had room to sleep Linda, Jennifer and Brenda, in the shelter. Jennifer and Brenda would have to double up, but it beat having them stay in a motel. He also told the boys to come back the next night and bring a couple of trustworthy people. There were two bedroom suites that had to be moved to the shelter, too. Derek said he'd see if Randy and Chris were available to help, or maybe Chris and Matt.

23Jun2009...

Gary was still pretty worried about Ronald McDonald and after a quick breakfast, Clarence, Linda, Jennifer, Brenda and he piled into his used Dodge diesel 6 passenger pickup and they headed to the Citadel. Ron was still in ICU, but Dr. S (Ravi Shankar, really) happened to be there checking on him. When the doctor had finished up, he had come out and explained to them that Ron appeared to be responding to treatment, albeit slowly. Dr. E had been in earlier, he said, and Ron's heart was holding up just fine. Dr. S then went on to say that if they returned to New Mexico, Ron would be dead within a year, probably less. Ron had COPD and he simply couldn't handle living at 6,200'. Gary and Clarence left the women at the hospital and returned home.

"I'm not trying to rush you pal," Gary commented, "But did you get a chance to visit with Lucy about building a home next to ours?"

"We visited some, Gary," Clarence replied. "We was thinking maybe we could move my sister into the other master suite and put a spare guest bedroom in the basement. But

we're a bit short on paying cash for the home outright."

"That's what banks are for Clarence," Gary replied. "If you can put at least two-thirds of the price up, you shouldn't have any problem financing the remainder. "Besides, if you use the same floor plan and same contractors we did, you can probably shave a little off the cost. A lot of the stuff we did was original and they had to figure it out. They won't have that problem building an identical home."

"I don't know if I like that vinyl siding on your home," Clarence observed. "I've always been partial to stucco."

"That's what the contractor and engineer wanted to do, Clarence, stucco the house," Gary explained, "But Sharon wanted that low maintenance vinyl siding so we ended up paying extra for it. If you go to stucco, you'll probably just cut the cost of your home some more."

"Well alright then," Clarence said, "You've talked me into it."

Gary let out a mental sigh of relief. He'd found a spare moment somewhere during the course of the previous day and had made an appointment with the engineer and primary building contractor for 2pm that afternoon. He knew he was being presumptuous, but what the hell, Clarence was a clear-headed individual and Gary more than suspected he'd come around. At least he hadn't made an ass out of you and me by assuming, this time.

The Three Amigos Part III – The Three Amigos Ride Again – Chapter 41 – New Places

2pm, same day...

The problem with guys like Gary, who occasionally took it upon themselves to manipulate a situation, was that it took them a while to wind down once they got on a roll. Ron was still on a respirator and Gary had pretty well made up his mind that Ron and Linda were moving back to Palmdale, whether they wanted to or not. Not that there weren't better solutions perhaps, but Ron had doctored with E since 92 and with S for over 6 years. It just didn't make any sense to Gary for Ron to not get the best medical care possible and the best to be had in the area was right there at the Citadel. Hell, Ron's brother Robert had to go all the way to Denver to get the treatment he and his wife had needed, so it was evident to Gary that Ron belonged in Palmdale. Besides, Gary had missed Ron so much he'd darned near gone nuts.

The engineer and contractor took a seat at the folding conference table Gary had set up in the basement. Gary had barely let them get seated before he started in on them.

"My friend Clarence here, wants to build a home just like ours except without the sub-basement," Gary explained. "What's the best price you two think you could come up with?"

"Build exactly like yours, Gary, \$200k," the contractor answered.

"Ah bull," Gary said, "I happen to know that part of the cost of my home was due to all of the engineering you fellas had to do to make mine work. You aren't going to have to re-invent the wheel here, so how about a little more realistic estimate."

"Bottom line, assuming we leave the Kevlar out of the walls, \$175,000," The contractor said. "With a foot of concrete, you don't need that Kevlar anyway."

"Clarence wants stucco walls," Gary added.

"Ok \$170,000, but I won't go a penny lower," the contractor said.

"Clarence, what do you think?" Gary asked.

"Sounds pretty good to me Gary," Clarence replied.

"Now, before we get all worked up over this, I have another question," Gary said. "How much more could you cut the price if you built two homes at the same time, both with the stucco?"

"I told you \$170,000 was as low as I could go," the contractor said, "And that goes whether you build one home or a dozen."

“Ok, fair enough,” Gary said, “But how about putting in a tunnel to connect the basements of the three homes in the stairwell of my subbasement?”

“I suppose that I could throw that in,” the contractor said, “It isn’t a lot of materials and the excavating won’t be that much.”

“When can you start?” Gary asked.

“Say about 3 weeks,” the contractor replied.

“Clarence?” Gary asked. Clarence nodded.

“You’ve got yourself a deal,” Gary said. “I’ll get the lots staked out and you can start in three weeks.”

The contractor and engineer rose as if to leave.

“Hold on there a minute fellas,” Gary said, “There’s more. When can we start on the water tank upgrade?”

“You wanted a 50,000-gallon tank, right?” the engineer asked.

“I somehow had it in the back of my mind that we’d talked about a 100,000-gallon tank,” Gary said, “Is my memory letting me down?”

“Well, yes and no,” the engineer replied. “You asked me how much extra it would cost to double the tank size to 100,000-gallons and I believe I told you about 25%. I also pointed out to you that the 6” well would be pushed to keep that 100,000-gallon tank full, depending upon your water usage.”

“Let’s go with the 100,000-gallon tank,” Gary said, “We can always dig a second well if we have a problem. When can a contractor start on that tank?”

“I don’t really know,” the engineer said, “But my best guess would be about a month.”

“If you fellas want to get everything arranged and draw the papers up, we’ll sign them when they’re ready,” Gary announced.

After the men left, Clarence began to hit Gary with questions.

“What about a garage for my car?” Clarence asked.

“Darn, I knew I’d forgotten something, Clarence,” Gary said, “Do you want the house to the right of our home or the left of our home, looking from out front?”

“Oh, the right one, I guess,” Clarence said, “what difference does it make?”

Gary went to his storage cabinet and pulled out a box. It was filled with carefully labeled Stanley garage door openers. He sorted through the box until he found the opener for bay 6, the far right bay of the 6-stall garage and gave the opener to Clarence.

“That opener opens the far right bay in the garage,” Gary said.

“Man that garage sits a way back Gary,” Clarence said, “That’s going to be quite a walk in the winter.”

“No it’s not Clarence,” Gary laughed, “That contractor doesn’t know it yet, but he’s also going to put in a tunnel from the garage to the tunnel connecting the two homes to my shelter.”

“I don’t know when I’ve ever seen you like this Gary,” Clarence remarked.

“Enjoy it while it lasts, Clarence, it’s going to wear off soon and I’ll be back to the mouse I usually act like,” Gary explained.

“That sounds like a good title for a movie,” Clarence said, *The Mouse that Roared.*”

“1959, starring Peter Sellers,” Gary said.

They made their way back to the Citadel to check on Ron and see how the ladies were making out. Ron was showing a marginal improvement and Linda told Gary and Clarence that the last chest X-Ray had shown that they were doing a good job of getting his lungs cleared out. Dr S had suggested to her that about 3 more days on the respirator should see Ron completely out of the woods and up and around. Gary suggested that since Ron was in an induced coma, they probably should get back to the house, have a bite to eat and rest. Once Ron was awake, he’d probably want someone there 24/7.

When they got back to the house, Gary and Clarence sat down with Linda to visit. She filled them in on a few other details about Ron’s condition and Gary decided it was time to bring up a sensitive subject.

“As I understand what Shankar said, Linda, Ron can’t go on living at 6,200’. Have you given any consideration to where you might move?”

“Well, the girls and I were visiting at the hospital and they’re suggesting that we might want to move to Ft. Smith,” Linda replied.

“That makes a lot of sense,” Gary said, “But what kind of medical treatment is available in Ft Smith and what’s the climate like?”

“Why do you ask?” Linda asked.

“Well, Ron and I both suffer from COPD and according to conversations I’ve had with Shankar, the Antelope Valley is one of the best climates in the country if you have COPD,” Gary explained. “I don’t know much about Ft. Smith, but I’d be willing to bet that the relative humidity is one hell of a lot higher than it is here.”

“I hadn’t thought about that,” Linda admitted.

“Did Sharon give you a tour of the house?” Gary asked.

“Yes, you really have a nice home,” Linda said.

“How would you like to have one just like it?” Gary asked.

“We couldn’t afford anything this expensive even after we sold our home in New Mexico,” Linda said.

“How much do you think this house cost, Linda?” Gary asked.

“I don’t know, \$400 or \$500 thousand,” Linda ventured.

“Pal, you aren’t even close,” Gary laughed. “What if I told you that you could have a house just like this one, without the shelter of course, for \$170,000?”

“I’d say you were out of your mind,” Linda laughed.

“Clarence, tell the lady the facts of life,” Gary urged.

“Linda, Lucy and I bought an identical home this morning for \$170,000,” Clarence said. “The only difference between our home and Gary’s home is that shelter downstairs. And the contractor agreed to connect all of the homes to Gary’s shelter via tunnel at no charge.”

“I wish I had been here,” Linda said, “I’d have probably bought one too at that price.”

“What about Ft. Smith?” Gary asked.

“Well, if what you tell me about the AV and COPD is right, Gary,” Linda said, “I guess it isn’t much of an alternative.”

“And how mad would you be at me if I told you that I took a wild chance and ordered a home for the two of you, just in case?” Gary asked.

“In our names?” Linda asked.

“No, in my name,” Gary said, “But I was truly hoping that I could persuade you to stay

here in the AV, so I took a chance. Of course if you don't want it, it's no problem, I'll just sell it to someone else for what it's really worth, like \$250,000."

"Ron always said to watch out for you," Linda smiled, "He said that when you got the bit in your teeth, you were a wild man."

"I don't think there's another human being on the face of this planet that knows me better than Ron," Gary agreed, "But Clarence makes a close second."

"You knew that Ron bought himself one of those Barrett M82A1M rifles didn't you?" Linda asked.

"No, Linda, we haven't talked all that much since you guys moved," Gary said, "But it just so happens that I bought a Tac-50 from our favorite gun dealer."

"Hey, I want one of those, whatever they are," Clarence said. "What is an M82A1M, Gary?"

"Clarence, it's a .50 caliber rifle manufactured by Barrett," Gary explained. "It shoots the same cartridge as a .50 caliber machine gun. They are a heavy darned thing, but man do they have a reach. Oh, and they're 100% illegal in California."

"Sheesh, Gary," Clarence said, "I didn't figure you'd buy one if they were legal. How expensive are they?"

"The McMillan Tac-50 is about 9 grand including optics," Gary replied, "are you sure you want one?"

"The Barrett?"

"More."

"I'll have to wait and see how much money we have left over after we pay for the house, Gary," Clarence said, "But if I can talk Lucy into using our old furniture, I can afford a rifle."

The Three Amigos Part III – The Three Amigos Ride Again – Chapter 42 – New Places 2

“We had to return all those trailers and pickups we borrowed, but somehow we never got around to returning all of those golf carts, partner,” Gary pointed out. We just doctored the serial numbers on three of them and repainted them. They’re parked in one of the bays in the garage.”

“I’ve have never thought you’d stoop so low as to steal those golf carts permanent like, Gary,” Clarence said.

“Well, they’d already collected the insurance claims on all 12 carts by the time we got around to returning the 9 and the guy at the golf course made a remark that he hoped he didn’t get the others back because they had spent the insurance money on new carts. Hell, I just accommodated him,” Gary explained.

“Still...” Clarence said.

“Yeah, I know, but I got over it, so you can too,” Gary pointed out. “What the hell, partner, that armory we have built up is more military weapons than it is stuff we bought. Somehow, I have a feeling in my gut that this country hasn’t seen the last of terrorists or trouble. At least we have a good one in the White House. This Santorum fella is a conservative Republican, but he sure doesn’t act like it. I’ll tell you one group he has really po’d is those anti-gunners. I sure hope that the Secret Service keeps him under tight wraps. One of these days, one of those militant members of that Sarah Brady crowd is going to take a pot shot at him. Hell, they aren’t a whole lot different than those right-to-lifers that go around killing doctors as far as I am concerned.”

“I know that I’ve said this before,” Clarence quietly commented, “But hasn’t this country been through enough?”

“Clarence, I’ve begun to believe that the US has a bullseye painted on it,” Gary replied. “As a whole, we enjoy the greatest level of freedom of anywhere in the world. Our standard of living is unsurpassed except for perhaps a few countries, none of which I could name. Hell, there’s always someone starving to death, like Somalia or the Sudan or somewhere. And every time we try to help, we end up being the bad guy. I have more questions than answers, for sure. The US is danged if it does and danged if it doesn’t. So I suppose as long as the world is less than perfect, someone who is jealous of what we have will want to punish us.”

The US was far from perfect, but it beat the hell out of whoever was in second place. Santorum had instituted a program to eliminate outsourcing of jobs and that had made the manufacturers angry with him. He’d introduced legislation to repeal the Gun Control Act of 1968 and that had really po’d the Brady bunch. Doing background checks apparently seemed to make sense to him and he hadn’t actually tried to repeal the Brady Bill. Anyway, the NRA considered Santorum to be a friend and spent a lot of ILA funds pro-

moting his proposed legislation, further angering the Brady crowd.

Then there were the pro-choice vs. the right-to-lifers. Santorum kept his mouth shut on that issue and left it to the Judiciary to resolve that debate. That wasn't to say that he'd never expressed himself on the subject, but since he'd been elected, he dodged every question posed to him in that area. Gary wished that Santorum would take a stand and say that abortion was illegal except in the case of rape or incest, but no one had asked Gary's opinion and Gary wasn't in a volunteering mood.

From Gary's viewpoint, right or wrong, it seemed that some people used abortions to select the sex of their children, something he felt was very wrong. And, it wasn't like you couldn't take birth control pills or use a condom if you wanted a sexual relationship that didn't run the risk of producing a pregnancy. Hell, there was even the morning after pill, just in case. But rape and incest were involuntary acts and Gary believed that pregnancies resulting from that involuntary illegal and immoral behavior should be terminated if that was the woman's choice. To force a woman to have a child that she hadn't voluntarily conceived just seemed to be so wrong to him.

Santorum had stepped in it big time with that controversy he created when he made a strong anti-gay statement. Gary couldn't blame him, he felt the same way. The thing about it was, Gary was not and never would be a politician.

30Jun2009...

Ron was off the respirator and doing well. It looked as if they'd release him in another couple of days. Clarence and Lucy had switched bedrooms with Linda so Ron wouldn't have to climb any stairs. Gary knew, based on his experience in the hospital that Ron would need 3-4 weeks to get back to feeling like a human being. Gary had actually done pretty well after his hospitalization except for the edema. It had taken a while to get his legs, feet and ankles back to normal. He knew he needed to walk for exercise, but every time he took Missy out, he paid dearly. And getting his blood sugar regulated had taken nearly as long. So, Ron could have the run of the main floor when he got out of the Citadel and then, as he was able, he could try walking and climbing stairs.

Linda had carefully explained to Ron the problems he faced living in New Mexico and had gone on to explain that they had a new home which would begin construction in a few days. She must have caught Ron at just the right moment, because he didn't raise a single objection. And then when she explained that the house would only cost \$170,000 but would be worth \$250,000 the minute it was finished, Ron brightened considerably. Gary, she said, had given them a ½ acre lot for the home and had done the same for Clarence. The Three Amigos, she said, would ride again. Ron asked about the house in New Mexico and their possessions, but she just told him that everything was being taken care of and declined to provide further details.

Gary and Clarence hadn't missed a day visiting Ron and they were actually at the hospital when the doctors brought Ron up off the drugs. The first words out of Ron's mouth

were, “Hey uglier than me, what are you doing in New Mexico?”

Gary retorted with, “New Mexico? Hell, partner you’re in Palmdale, you’d have died if we left you in New Mexico. You’re at the Citadel, the hospital you helped build.”

Ron had dozed off immediately and Gary and Clarence left so Linda could sit with Ron. There was a time and place for everything and this was neither the time nor the place to renew the friendship. Ron did look pretty good, though. His color was one hell of a lot better and he seemed to be breathing easily enough. Dr. E stopped Gary and Clarence in the hall and Gary asked how Ron had made out on his heart. Because Gary was technically staff, being a member of the Board, Dr. E explained that Ron hadn’t suffered any additional permanent damage to his heart but that it would take several weeks for him to get back up to speed.

When Gary and Clarence got back to the house, they got a big surprise. The contractor had actually started early and already had Clarence’s basement dug. Ron’s basement looked like it would be done before the day was over too. Gary saw the contractor talking to a man Gary presumed was one of the foremen and walked over to have a visit.

“You got started earlier than you planned, I see,” Gary said.

“Had a couple of down days on the excavating equipment and figured it was as good a time as any to dig your holes,” the contractor said.

“Say, a small issue came up after we signed those contracts that I wanted to talk to you about,” Gary said, “Do you have a minute?”

“Sure, what’s up?” the contractor asked.

“That danged garage is so far back from the houses,” Gary started, “That Clarence and I got to wondering how much you’d charge us to run a tunnel from the garage up to the tunnel connecting the homes.”

“Well hell,” the contractor said, “The excavator is already here and will be digging the tunnels in the morning. I’ll just tell him to dig a tunnel to the garage too.”

“You realize that we want those tunnels at the same level as the subbasement don’t you?” Gary asked.

“I figured as much, Gary so that’s what I planned on, yes,” the contractor said.

“And how much do you figure that extra tunnel is going to cost us?” Gary asked. “We were sort of thinking that before this project is all over, there might be several more homes here.”

“Really?” the contractor said. “Aw hell, Gary, it won’t take much concrete, I’ll throw it in.”

“Why thank you,” Gary said, “I really appreciate that.”

Gary walked back to where Clarence was standing (within earshot) and the two of them walked to the house.

“You spent too much time around Tony,” Clarence said, “You could charm the pennies off a dead man’s eyes.”

“Did I say one word to the man that was a lie?” Gary asked.

“No.”

“Did I ask him to give me anything or did I just ask the cost?” Gary asked.

“You just asked the cost,” Clarence said, “But you implied that there were several more homes involved.”

“All I said was, we were sort of thinking that before this project is all over, there might be several more homes here,” Gary retorted. “That the gospel truth Clarence, there MIGHT be several more homes here.”

“Yeah and there MIGHT not be several more home here, too, right?” Clarence said.

“True, but it wasn’t my greed that got him to throw in the extra 100’ of tunnel,” Gary said. “Hell he’s making money on these two homes or he wouldn’t be doing them. All I did was cut his profit margin a little.”

“Man, can you split a hair,” Clarence laughed.

Two days later, Ron was released from the Citadel. Given his status as a former Board member he didn’t have to go through the usual hurry up and wait routine either. He was considered a VIP and accorded appropriate treatment. Gary had seen to a lot of stream lining of procedures as a board member, based on his experiences with hospitals, but there were medical considerations and there was only so much a person could do. Ron’s discharge was a perfect example of what Gary had been trying to achieve. After all wasn’t every patient a VIP? Gary would talk to the Foundation about getting Ron and Clarence back on the Board and maybe they could team up on the staff and make a point.

“Man, I feel like a million bucks,” Ron said on the way back to the house.

“Don’t get used to it yet partner,” Gary said. “About this time tomorrow, you’ll feel like you’ve been drug through a knothole backwards. Clarence and I’ve visited with your doctors and you’re going to be a while getting back up to speed. Just for meanness, I ought to drag your sorry butt to an AA meeting a week after you get out of the hospital

like you did to me. Took me 3 days to get over that little outing.”

“What the hell has gotten into you?” Ron asked. “You seem to be a bit on the aggressive side.”

“Well partner, when you got sick, I switched into that management mode I told you about,” Gary explained. “But now that you’re out of the hospital and I can quit worrying about you, it will wear off. Give it a couple days and I’ll be a mouse again.”

As they pulled into the driveway Ron noticed the building construction that was now moving at a rapid pace.

“Which one is mine?” he asked.

“The one on the left, Ron,” Clarence said, “And mine is on the right.”

“Are those concrete walls a foot thick?” Ron asked.

“Sure are partner,” Gary replied, “If you’re up to it tomorrow I’ll show you the finer points of these homes. I’m not sure, you know, but I speculate that they’d take a pretty heavy direct assault from anything under a 25mm round. I know for a fact that a guy with a .50 BMG and armor piercing would have a tough time getting through my walls. I added 20 layers of Kevlar to my inside framing.”

“You mean I don’t have the Kevlar lining?” Ron asked.

“No, did you want it? It will add \$5,000 to the price,” Gary pointed out.

“You dang right I want it,” Ron said, “Is it too late to change the plans?”

“Nope, I just have to tell the contractor that we need a change order for the Kevlar,” Gary said.

“Gary, have him put the Kevlar in our home too,” Clarence said, “I can handle the extra \$5,000 without a problem.”

“I’ll go talk to him now before they get too far along,” Gary said. “Clarence, do you want to help our amigo into the house?”

Gary walked over to the contractor.

“Say, the fellas want to put in a change order on those homes,” Gary said.

“Kevlar?” the contractor asked.

“Yeah, how did you know?” Gary asked.

“Ah hell, you survivalists are all alike, and besides, I’ve heard about the three of you,” he laughed. “I have the Kevlar already to go in with the framing and the change order prepared.

“You’re the guys that pulled that library raid, right?” the contractor asked.

“What raid was that?” Gary said a twinkle in his eye.

“I’ve read all of your stories, Tired Old Man,” the contractor said, “You do fair, but your stories could use more action. But I’ll tell you one thing. One of these days, the feds or the state are going to get confused over your mixture of facts and fiction and come looking for all those illegal guns you claim to have.”

“Fine by me,” Gary said, “They won’t find a thing. The problem is that once they get their mind made up, they’ll harass me to death.”

The Three Amigos Part III – The Three Amigos Ride Again – Chapter 43 – New Challenges

Having the experience of constructing Gary and Sharon's home, the contractor had figured out a lot of short cuts. Consequently he had the project done sooner than he thought he would. And, getting the project done sooner meant that his profit margin was just a little better than he'd planned. Even putting in that extra 100' of tunnel hadn't cut into his profits. If Gary was serious about building more homes in the near future, he could probably still put them up at \$170,000 a crack, despite the rising costs in building materials.

Linda had flown to Albuquerque just before their home was done and met with the moving company she'd hired. They were going to move everything except Ron's 2 gun safes. She'd heard a few horror stories about moving companies and had persuaded Damon and Derek to drive to New Mexico, load the gun safes aboard a pickup and haul them to California. They were going to use a cover story to get past the border check and Gary had dug into his files and come up with some blank bills of lading. With Damon proving guidance, they'd made up a fake bill of lading for two used guns safes. And they checked to make sure that the loaded safes wouldn't make the pickup over weight. They'd ended up borrowing Randy's pickup because it had overload springs and the appropriate weight permits. Damon had been an over-the-road trucker for about 3 years and he knew all the tricks of the trade, including how to avoid weigh stations if it came to that. But, according to their calculations, they had 1,000-pounds to spare on the truck licensing.

Linda had left on Wednesday and the boys took Friday afternoon off. They planned to drive straight through to Ron and Linda's, load up and drive straight back to Palmdale. The trip outbound went without a hitch. They had to struggle a bit but they got the first safe on the pickup with the door facing to the rear. The second safe was loaded on the pickup with the door facing to the front. Damon took extra pains to strap the safes down, the last thing they needed was a shifting load. Then they headed back to California. Damon knew of a truck stop favored by truckers because it had a very accurate scale. They weighed the pickup and they were 940 pounds under the weight limit for the permits on the truck. They figured they were home free and proceeded to head home on I-40. They actually made it to the California border before TSHTF. When they pulled into the Agricultural Inspection Station in Blythe, they went through the truck lane. Some over eager newbie directed them to pull off so he could inspect the load. They produced the bill of lading, but this jerk actually wanted to look inside the guns safes.

Derek gave Damon a look that said, "What are we going to do now?" Damon winked at Derek and motioned for Derek to follow him. They walked over to a bench and took a seat.

"Well, what the hell is going on? Derek whispered.

"Looks like we got us some guy who just started on the job and wants to impress some-

one,” Damon replied. “That truck is definitely not overweight. And, we’re under no obligation to help them inspect the cargo since the entire cargo is plainly visible. Now, as it happens, those gun safes have combination locks and I don’t know the combinations, do you?”

“No, Linda didn’t give me the combinations,” Derek replied.

“So let them look,” Damon said. “And don’t volunteer to help that jerk out either. If he wants to move the safes, he can get some of those California folks to help him.”

The inspector came walking over and told Damon to unstrap the safes. Damon tilted his face up and said, “The cargo on that manifest is plainly visible, if you want those safes unstrapped, do it yourself.”

The inspected turned beet red and went into the building to, apparently, visit with his supervisor. He returned with his supervisor in tow. “My man says that he asked you to unstrap the safes is that true?” the supervisor asked.

“Sure is,” Damon said, “And I told him that since the cargo on the manifest was plainly visible, that he’d have to do it himself.”

“We’re going to have to take a look inside those safes,” the supervisor said.

“Suit yourself,” Damon said, “No skin off my nose. The problem is that my brother and I are just doing a favor for a friend. The guy has been in the hospital for quite a while in Palmdale. They had to fly him all the way in an air ambulance and he darn near died. Anyway, that’s neither here nor there. You just get your search warrant and cut the locks off those safes. They didn’t give us the combinations.”

“Are the safes empty?” the supervisor asked.

“I don’t really know one way or the other,” Damon replied. “The guy’s wife just had us load them and haul them. But I can tell you this much, the people involved lived in Palmdale until about a year ago. They guy moved to New Mexico to be with his brother and the brother died a while back. Then the guy, his name is Ron Green, by the way, caught a cold and darn near died from it. My dad and him are best friends and we’re just trying to do them a favor. You know, I drove over the road for a few years, and of all the BS I ever had to put up with, I never ran into a situation like this. But, I suppose that you just have a job to do so you do your job. Me, I’m just going to sit here and watch.”

“Did you weigh that truck?” the supervisor asked the kid.

“Yes Sir, it was 940-pounds below the weight limit,” the kid answered.

“If we get a warrant and cut those safes open and they’re empty, we’re going to look pretty damned foolish aren’t we?” the supervisor commented.

“But we have the right to inspect those gun safes,” the kid said.

“Yes we do,” the supervisor said, “So you go ahead and do whatever you want to do and I won’t interfere.”

The kid was still beet red. And, he was po’d. But, it just seemed to him that his supervisor wasn’t backing him up, or so he assumed. He just stood there for a minute or two thinking. Heaven only knows what was going through the kid’s mind. Damon was almost choking himself suppressing a grin. Finally, the kid handed the bill of lading to Damon and said, “Forget it,” turned on his heel and walked away. Damon and Derek walked over to Randy’s pickup and Derek got in. Damon checked the straps to make sure they were secure and climbed in the passenger side of the pickup. Derek started the motor and eased the pickup back into traffic.

“Jeez, I thought we were dead back there,” Derek finally said.

“I figured it was about 50-50 myself, but I never said anything that wasn’t true, Derek,” Damon replied. “We haven’t seen inside those gun safes so we can’t say for sure what’s inside them now can we?”

“You know darn good and well that they full of guns,” Derek said.

“Do I?” Damon said. “I might think that they’re full of guns but having never seen inside, I don’t know that for a fact.”

“You’re as bad as Dad about splitting hairs,” Derek said.

“Why thank you, I’ll take that as a compliment,” Damon laughed.

The remainder of the trip to Palmdale was completed in relative silence. Derek rather admired his Dad’s ability to split hairs, too, but he’d never gotten the knack of it. It about half po’d him that Damon had appeared to have mastered the art. They arrived at the house and unloaded the gun safes into one of the garage stalls. Gary came out and asked if they had any trouble. “Damon replied, “Nothing special, just the usual BS. But we made it so it’s not worth mentioning.”

Derek took Damon home and turned around and drove right back to Gary’s. He filled Gary in on exactly what had happened at the border. Gary told Derek that he really needed to learn to lighten up; the truth, he said was a precise thing and as long as what you said was true, you were under no obligation to volunteer any information. He then went on to explain in intimate detail what splitting hairs was all about. Never lie, he said, because a lie could trap you. However, that didn’t mean that you had to tell the WHOLE truth, unless you were in court and sworn to do so. Gary assured Derek that with time he’d learn how to control the amount of truth he felt obligated to tell. In the meantime, Gary said, he rather admired Derek’s position. He then turned to the subject of tact. Did

Derek understand that tact involved exactly the same principle? Gary then told his son something he'd never admitted to another human being. He'd had the same problem as Derek and he'd been in his late 40's before he'd learned to be tactful. After that, splitting hairs just seemed to naturally follow.

When Gary returned to the house a second time, Ron wanted to know what was going on. Gary explained what had happened at the Agricultural Inspection Station and the close call the boys had. He then shared with Ron the problem that Derek was having with the concept of splitting hairs. Ron told Gary that he should explain tact to the boy and he'd figure it out from there. Gary said that great minds must run in the same groove, he'd done that very thing. Ron allowed how it was a shame that Derek was pretty much a teetotaler, if the boy drank a little more, he'd figure it out real quick. Gary reminded Ron the alcoholism was genetic and if Ron didn't mind, he rather have a teetotaler than a drunk for a son. It was late and Ron was beginning to show the inevitable fatigue that Gary had warned him would follow his release from the hospital. Ron's CPAP was on the truck coming from New Mexico, so Gary loaned Ron his spare and his nose mask.

One of the things that Shankar had done was change when Gary took his insulin. Since Gary took his pills at the same time, right before supper, he tended to miss one hell of a lot of TV. But given that state of TV programming in 2009, he didn't figure he was missing all that much. Everyone settled in and by 9pm only the brave and hardy souls were in the basement watching TV.

July 4, 2009...

"Well fellas it's a holiday," Gary said, "I wonder who is going to attack the US this time?"

"I don't know Gary." Clarence replied, "But I picking up one of those McMillan rifles so I'm ready for bear."

"What kind of ammo are you getting for it?" Gary asked.

"Well, I wasn't quite sure what to buy so I thought I'd 10 of those 80 round cartons that Barrett's sells," Clarence replied.

"You'd be better off with 750gr Hornady A-MAX Match," Gary said.

"Well, I wasn't sure what to get so I held off until I could talk to you boys," Clarence admitted.

"I'm not saying the one scope is better than another," Gary replied, "But I went with a Night Force 12-42x56 Mil Dot plus a McCann Night Vision Rail Mount and that Titanium Jet Suppressor. Extra magazines are expensive so I only bought 8, giving me a total of 10. My ball ammo is Hornady A-MAX 750gr Match plus our lady friend found me some Mk 211MP. Hey Ron, what did you put on your Barrett for a scope?"

“Leupold Mk 4, Gar-Bear, Ron answered. “Suits me just fine.”

“The Tac-50 includes an Mk 4, Clarence. The Night Force only costs \$70 more,” Gary added.

“Where can I get one of those scopes?” Clarence asked.

“Well, Sandy usually has a couple in stock and she’ll install it for free,” Ron said. “This is like the good old days after 11/12/05. Running around on golf carts looking like a portable armory.”

“Clarence, if you go with the Tac-50, the scope I got will only cost you about \$70 and comes installed. Sandy can order the Jet Suppressor for you and get it installed. The magazines are \$330 each but it comes with two. Ron, how are you feeling?”

“That nose mask you loaned me is about 10 times better than the one I had,” Ron said, “Where did you get that?”

“Down in the Valley where I get all of my stuff,” Gary explained. “How long has it been since you got your nose mask?”

“It’s been at least a year,” Ron replied.

“Then why don’t you let me call down there and we’ll each get a new nose mask?” Gary suggested. “Medicare will pay for a new mask after six months. And the way I see it, we’re paying some awful Medicare premiums these days so we might just as well get our fair share.”

“Suits me, Gar-Bear,” Ron said, “Give them a call.”

The Three Amigos Part III – The Three Amigos Ride Again – Chapter 44 – New Challenges 2

“Say, did the doc put you on Albuterol and Atrovent?” Gary asked.

“Yeah, why?” Ron asked.

“Did he give you an Rx?” Gary asked.

“Yes, of course,” Ron said.

“Did you fill it yet?” Gary asked.

“Do you have any idea how much it would cost to fill the Rx he gave me?” Ron asked.

“Sure do, nothing,” Gary replied.

“How do you figure that?” Ron asked.

“Take the Rx to Walgreen’s and show them your Medicare card, Ron,” The co-pay will come up zero. “As for the Nebulizer, you can rent one from that place in the Valley and Medicare will pay 80% of the cost.”

“That must be why he wrote separate Rx’s.” Ron said.

“I’ll call Robert tomorrow and tell him that we need new nose masks and that you need a Nebulizer. In the meantime, I have plenty of the drugs and I have Audrey’s Nebulizer so we’ll rig you up and you can start those treatments right away. I even have a new spare Nebulizer mask in a sealed package, so we’re good to go.” Gary explained.

“Are those Nebulizer treatments all that important Gary-Bear?” Ron asked. “My discharge papers said QID/PRN, whatever that means.”

“Four times a day as needed, partner,” Gary replied, “Hell yes they’re important, that’s why he wrote the Rx. But without an Rx for a nose mask, you’ll have to take your old one along so he’ll know that you’ve been prescribed one. Then he can follow up with Shankar for an Rx.”

“You seem to have a handle on this stuff,” Ron said, “How did you get so well informed?”

“Del Taco, Ronald.” Gary said “Been there, done that. The only thing I don’t know squat about is heart attacks. Never had one of those. And if I never have one of those, that’s plenty soon enough to suit me.”

“Have you seen those home defibrillators?” Ron asked.

“Yeah, but they’re flippin’ expensive and if you’re by yourself, you only have a 50/50 chance,” Gary said.

“Why’s that?” Ron asked.

“Do you know what a defibrillator does?” Gary asked.

“Restarts the heart,” Ron said.

“Yeah and brown cows give chocolate milk,” Gary laughed. “A defibrillator stops the heart momentarily and allows the normal regulator to reestablish a normal sinus rhythm. But if the heart doesn’t restart, you need CPR. Before they went non-prescription, you could only get one if you had a family member certified in CPR. And if you go out on the web, what you’re going to find is that one of those home defibrillators is considered a part of the treatment with CPR constituting the remainder.”

“How’s that different from a heart attack?” Ron asked.

“A heart attack is typically a MI, Myocardial Infarction. That happens when an artery feeding blood to the heart gets blocked and the muscle starts to die,” Gary explained. “It’s when the electrical pulses to the heart get screwed up and the heart beats out of synch failing to provide any blood flow. They include cardiac arrhythmias, ventricular fibrillation and pulseless ventricular tachycardia. From what I’ve read, your chances of surviving go down about 10% for every minute you are in defib. That’s when you need the home defib and someone to administer CPR.”

“What about the Paramedics?” Clarence asked.

“Crap Clarence, they’re part of the fire department and you know how long it takes for the fire department to get anywhere in Palmdale. Figure you have to be defibbed and have CPR applied within 5 minutes for a good shot at survival. You ever call the paramedics in Palmdale?”

“For a dope who doesn’t know crap about heart attacks,” Ron said, “You seem to be pretty well informed.”

“Well, I have a treadmill and an echocardiogram every 6 months,” Gary said. “I always write down any questions that occur to me and grill the doctor. When are you two yard birds going to learn that knowledge is power?”

“Well, all that fancy knowledge didn’t save your butt when you ended up in AV Hospital,” Ron said.

“Like hell it didn’t, Ronald, I knew enough to know I was in over my head and told the Paramedic that I was cool with going to the Hospital. Hell, I even remember my moth-

er's advice and put on clean drawers and a clean T-shirt. I'm not a doctor and have never claimed to be one," Gary said, "But what the hell is wrong with having a little basic knowledge?"

"Nothing, but you have a tendency to treat yourself, my friend," Ron grouched.

"Only the simple stuff, man," Gary replied, "And since that last trip to the hospital, I now know that me getting what I think is a cold is dangerous and I'll act accordingly. If I never set foot in a hospital as a patient again, that will be too soon for me."

"Other than not using the Nebulizer, Ron," Gary asked, "Are you following the doctors' orders?"

"Right down the line, Partner," Ron said.

"Good, then we'll get you fixed up with the Nebulizer and you should be back to 100% in no time." Gary said.

What the Barrett rifle was missing was a suppressor. Gary had called Sandy and let it be known that Ronald wanted a Jet suppressor for his M82 and that she might just as well come up with a Jet Suppressor for Clarence's new rifle, the Tac-50, which she'd better order from Phoenix. The following day, Gary called the Valley and set up the mask appointment and then Clarence and he went to see Sandy. Sandy told them that she needed a week this time because things were a little different these days.

Gary figured that what she was trying to say was that the ATF was all over her and didn't ask what she meant. The McMillan rifle only had to come from Phoenix, but the Jet suppressors had to come from Texas. Gary ordered more A-MAX and that had to come from Nebraska. She told him she'd have to see about the Raufoss. She'd have to check with the guy she knew at Olin.

Linda arrived after the furniture delivery truck showed up. The movers had pretty much just unloaded the truck and put the furniture where they wanted it to go. Linda took one look at the mess the movers had made and came unglued. She'd only stopped the one night in Flagstaff, but those movers must have driven straight through. John was more than willing to help his mother, but he couldn't do it alone. Gary called his 2 boys and asked if they could spare an hour to get 'Uncle' Ron's furniture squared away. They showed up about 30 minutes later and within an hour, had Ron and Linda's new home squared away, more or less. At least, all of the furniture was in the right rooms.

Clarence rented a truck and got some friends of his to help. It took one hell of a lot less time to square his place away and then they went for his sister's stuff. Before it was all said and done, they ended up spending a day getting Clarence and Lucy's new home squared away, because his sister had more stuff than he did. They put her bedroom furniture in the second master suite and a portion of her living room furniture in the living room, creating a second conversation pit. The remainder of her things ended up in the

basement.

Gary and Sharon were happy to have their home back, but Gary still had that nagging foreboding that something wasn't right with the country or the world. He'd pretty much learned to trust his gut, so he called Derek and asked Derek to bring The Three Amigos share of the armory over to the house. Derek was beginning to feel like a go-fer for his dad, but he went through the armory and loaded up everything marked Ron, Clarence and Gary.

"What's got you all worked up now?" Derek asked as he began to unload the weapons and ammo.

"I can't tell you," Gary said.

"Why not," Derek asked his dad.

"Because I don't know what's got me worked up, Derek," Gary replied. "If I knew, I'd tell you, but I just don't know. Most of the time when trouble is brewing, I get this sinking feeling in my gut well in advance. It's not 100%, but I've learned to trust it. Say I don't see any mines in this load."

"The mines are in boxes and stored, Dad," Derek explained. "You can't want mines too, can you?"

"I'd feel a whole lot better if we had a couple of dozen of those M-18's for our perimeter and maybe 18 of the LAW's," Gary replied.

"And I'd feel a whole lot better bringing that stuff over here if I had some idea what was up," Derek replied sternly.

"You aren't going to believe what I think, but if that's what it's going to take to get you to give us back our stuff, I'm willing to hazard a guess," Gary commented. "But remember, this is strictly a guess. I was thumbing through the Farmer's Almanac. We are forecast to have a real hot streak starting in a couple of weeks. The gang unrest in LA and the other major cities is at an all-time high. And I saw one of those militant members of the Brady bunch being interviewed on The Factor. He was saying that the gun crisis in the US would soon resolve itself when all hell broke loose and Congress had no choice except to pass some 'reasonable gun laws' totally outlawing guns."

"Huh. Well, all right, I'll bring the Claymores," Derek said, "Is there anything else you want while I'm at it? I'm feel like a go-fer at times and I have a life you know."

"You brought the 40mm grenades for the M16/M203's, right?" Gary asked. "And some of those hand grenades?"

"Get me some paper and a pen, Dad and we'll make a list," Derek chuckled, a little.

Gary got the paper and pencil and Derek started a list. As Gary went through the weapons and ammo Derek had brought, he'd raise a question from time to time and Derek would just add the stuff to the list.

"It looks to me like you forgot explosives," Derek shook his head.

"Don't want no flippin' explosives," Gary snapped. "The three of us never really figured that stuff out and we'd probably end up blowing our darn fool heads off. Say, have you been keeping that propane tank filled?"

"Money has been a little tight, Dad," Derek replied.

"Crap. I'll call tomorrow and have it filled for you," Gary said, "And it might not be a bad idea for you to take a few evenings and make sure all of the weapons are cleaned and ready to go. Get some of the residents at Moon Shadows to help you."

"We took down all of that barbed wire and concertina, too, Dad," Derek said. "It wasn't safe with all of the kids. I suppose you want me to put it back up too, huh?"

"Nah, but I really do think you should service those weapons," Gary replied.

"I'll load this stuff up and bring it back tomorrow night," Derek said.

"Thanks a lot kid, I really appreciate it," Gary answered.

Maybe it was some of that 'getting even' in Gary's soul, but the next morning he announced that the three of them needed a meeting. Clarence was eager enough, but Ron must have felt about like Gary did when he'd drug Gary to a meeting a week out of the hospital. Sandy should have the rifles ready, too and Gary figured to kill 2 birds with one stone. He told his amigos to be sure and bring their checkbooks, because they were stopping by Sandy's after the meeting.

There is no such thing as a 'bad' AA meeting, but some of them are one hell of a lot better than others. They endured this meeting and after headed for Sandy's. She saw them walk in the door and brought out a large hard sided case. Some of the other customers in the store were a bit curious considering the size of the case, but The Three Amigos just shined them on saying that the case contained a high grade precision target rifle. Well, it was mostly correct. The 3 old geezers loaded the weapon onto the back seat of the pickup and headed home. Gary could tell that Ron was done in. That would teach him. Olin would deliver in three days and Hornady tomorrow. Mike over-nighted the suppressors and she'd installed Clarence's.

When they got back to the homes, Ron said that he needed a nap and Gary asked Clarence to grab one of the golf carts and a trailer and give him a hand. Clarence headed for the garage and Gary put on a pot of coffee. Derek had just dumped the weapons

and ammo in the living room like Gary had asked. When Clarence came in the first words out of his mouth were, "What the hell?"

Gary suggested that they have a cup of coffee and he'd fill him in about what his gut was telling him.

The Three Amigos Part III – The Three Amigos Ride Again – Chapter 45 – Heat Wave

“Clarence, it’s like I told Derek last night,” Gary said as they settled in to drink their coffee. “The Farmer’s Almanac is predicting a heat wave, the gang unrest is at record levels and the bunch of militants associated with Sarah Brady is making threatening sounds.”

“So you had Derek bring over part of the arsenal?” Clarence replied.

“Well, he’ll be bringing the rest tonight, he forgot some stuff,” Gary said. “Now, do we want to distribute this stuff or put it in the shelter?”

“My sister is afraid of guns,” Clarence replied. “I feel a whole lot better just putting most of it in the storage room in the shelter.”

“I was afraid you were going to say that,” Gary laughed. “All right, after we finish our coffee, we’ll sort out a little stuff to distribute and haul the remainder downstairs.”

I guess I failed to mention that Ron’s gun safes were in the shelter. After Damon and Derek had unloaded them in one of the garage stalls, Clarence and Gary had gotten an appliance cart and manhandled the safes down the stairs in the garage to the tunnel and wheeled them to the shelter. Darn near killed them too, but they wouldn’t admit it. Clarence didn’t have a gun safe, so they’d mounted his open gun racks on the wall and had hung most of his guns on the racks. Each of them kept their Super Match M1A and a .45ACP M1911 at home, in case of trouble. Gary had placed Clarence’s Tac-50 in the storage room after they had gotten back from picking it up while Clarence was getting the golf cart and trailer.

Gary set aside the 3 M16/M203 assault rifles and the ALICE gear that went with them for distribution. Clarence took the golf cart back to the garage and came back with the appliance cart. It took some time, ammo sure can get heavy, but they got all of that ammo and the weapons to the storeroom. Clarence grabbed his ALICE gear and M16 and headed home. Gary grabbed Ron’s ALICE gear and M16 and headed to Ron’s. Afterwards Gary went out to visit with the fellas working on that 100,000-gallon water tank. They told him that the tank was done and had been flushed. All that was left to do was to finish painting it. It was filling now, but that would take a while.

Gary had thought about putting in a fire hydrant system, but the houses weren’t likely to burn, so he had the engineer put in a row of outlets in the water tank that the fire department could hook up to in case of a fire. He, to be perfectly honest, was pretty proud of what they’d managed to accomplish. They had 3 solid, nearly bulletproof homes; a bomb shelter if worse came to worse, and plenty of supplies. But, more importantly, The Three Amigos were back together. And, by God, they were a formidable team when they set their minds to a task. Yes they were old and not in the best of health. But what they lacked in physical ability he figured that they made up in cunning. With a house all

battened down with the shutters and everything, the average punk didn't stand a chance breaking in. And, with all of the trouble the country had been through since 11/12/05, none of the three of them was afraid to shoot someone when shooting was required.

That evening he checked the 10-day forecast on the weather channel. It looked like the Farmer's Almanac had been right; they were in for a hot spell over the next 10 days. Hell, it was already hot enough to fry an egg on the hood of your car; this was just what they needed. The forecast for LA was predicting temperatures in the hundreds, too. And, as a rule of thumb, you could add about 20 degrees to the LA temperature to get the temp in the high desert or 30 degrees to get the temp in the low desert around Palm Springs. It was a darned good thing they didn't live in Palm Springs. That was like Phoenix in the summer.

Gary called Derek, mainly to say hi. Derek didn't seem to be in a particularly good mood so he asked Derek what was bothering him. Derek finally revealed that he couldn't get anyone to help him clean the weapons and that he'd just spent two long nights getting everything shipshape. Gary told Derek he was sorry that no one would help but that people in California had trouble deciding whether to be patriots or sheeple. When times were good, Gary said, they said *Baa* a lot. Maybe, Gary said, they should give some thought to selling that house on Moonraker Road and building a new home out where The Three Amigos lived. That got them to discussing the amount of equity in the home and Derek and Mary would only be short about \$30,000 for a new home if they sold and rebuilt. Gary went on to point out that he had an earlier floor plan for his home that had 4 bedrooms and that it was something to think about.

Derek said that he was sorry, but he'd completely forgotten to bring by the second load of stuff. Was Gary still sure that he wanted it? Gary told Derek that the 10-day forecast was for a major heat wave and he surely did want the other items. They visited a while longer and Gary let Derek go to spend some time with Mary and the kids. Sharon was down in the quilting room working on one project or another, so he went to the master bedroom, did a Nebulizer treatment and settled in bed. He wasn't all that sleepy, so he turned on K-CAL channel 9 to listen to the news. They were steaming some live video from their chopper and Gary couldn't quite figure out what was going on. Then they cut to the announcer who summarized the video that they'd just shown. Apparently the Bloods and the Crips had broken their long-standing truce and had gone at it. LA had gotten a new police chief back in 2003 or 2004, a cop from New York. Unlike previous police Chiefs, this guy had sent in all the cops he could spare in an effort to quell the disturbance. That hadn't worked out particularly well because those gangsters were better armed than the police. The minute the police had shown up the gangsters quit fighting among themselves and had joined together to take on the police.

As of the moment, K-CAL 9 didn't have any information about the numbers of dead and injured, but promised more news at 10:00pm. After all of the trouble earlier, the gangs had been pretty well decimated. But, it hadn't taken all that long for them to re-form and the gang problems were worse than ever. LA had 3 principal gangs, the Bloods, the Crips and MS-13 in East LA. With the country crying for labor to rebuild the dams, one

would have thought that those young people in LA would have been grateful to have work, but it was a problem that went back for several generations and had only worsened when cocaine had entered into the picture. And, the problems weren't limited to Los Angeles by any means. Anywhere there was a ghetto containing 5th and 6th and 7th generation welfare recipients, there seemed to be trouble. Gary turned off the TV, got up and took another Xanax and settled in to sleep.

The next evening, Derek showed up with his pickup fairly well loaded with the stuff Gary had wanted. Derek looked beat, so Gary helped him and they just piled the stuff in the living room again. Then an armload at a time, Gary hauled the stuff to the storeroom in the shelter. Derek had offered to help but Gary had just lied to him and told him that Clarence would help. It didn't really take all that long anyway, there wasn't that much stuff. There were the 24 M-18 mines, 18 LAW's, 3 cylinders of 40mm grenades, 3 cases of hand grenades and about 500 rounds of .50BMG API. Gary wasn't even sure why he'd bothered with the hand grenades, he wasn't sure he could toss one far enough to avoid the blast radius, but it had seemed like the thing to do at the time.

And there was the other thing that Gary had screwed up on. With the houses all buttoned up, they were bulletproof as far as small arms fire went. And that was from the inside as well as from the outside. Gary had been so enthusiastic about sealing the places up that he'd never given a thought to leaving firing ports in the window shutters. He'd been thinking about this since Ron and Clarence's homes had been finished and the closest he'd come to a solution was thinking about installing CCTV. But, that still wouldn't let them return fire; it would just let them know what was coming their way. He guessed that they were going to have to cut holes in the shutters and mount a plate that could swing down to cover the hole when the firing port wasn't in use. Well, he had to do something, so he called Chris up to see if Chris could cut the holes and make the plates.

Chris suggested that Gary had it backwards, but what was new about that? They discussed the possible dimensions of the firing ports and agreed that 8" wide by 12" high ought to work. Chris said that before he cut the ports, he'd need to make the plates. The plates, Chris suggested ought to be about 18" by 12" and all that he needed to get started was the number of windows. Gary told Chris that he really hadn't ever counted the windows so he'd do that and get back to him. The living room had a large (and very expensive) window plus smaller windows on either side that opened, allowing for 2 firing ports. The master bedroom suite had two windows along the long wall allowing for two more firing ports. Since there were 2 master bedrooms, that made 6. The sliding glass door at the back of the bedroom didn't seem like a likely firing port, so Gary skipped that. Then, there was the dining room window, 7, the kitchen window, 8 and the laundry room window, 9. He called Chris back and said they needed 9 plates per house for each of the three houses. The shutters, he pointed out were $\frac{3}{4}$ " hot rolled steel plate.

Chris and Patti hadn't had the chance, or hadn't taken the time, to visit Sharon and Gary in their new home. Chris had been thinking that Gary had probably put up some $\frac{1}{2}$ " steel shutters, but realized that he should have known better. When Gary did some-

thing, he tended to overdo rather than underdo. Chris really didn't have the tools to work with that ¾" hot rolled steel plate, so he got on the phone and priced the 27 plates. Initially, he'd figured on drilling a hole at the top of the plate and letting it hang from the hole with a bolt, but he realized that that wouldn't do either. So, he got on the phone and started shopping for some really heavy-duty piano hinges. He wasn't having any luck so he called Gary back. Gary told him that the shutters used piano hinges and gave him the contractor's name. Maybe, Gary said, the contractor could steer him in the right direction. An hour later, Chris had located the piano hinges and all he had to do was buy the stuff, weld the hinges to the plates, cut the holes and weld the hinges to the shutters.

Chris also realized that each port represent a cut of 40". And knowing Gary, he wouldn't be satisfied unless the cuts were smooth. Now that meant that either he'd have to cut them with his torch and grind them smooth or use a saw and cut them as smoothly as possible. But, he'd told Gary he'd do it and he had a pretty good idea where he'd be spending his nights for the next 27 days. Meanwhile, Gary was thinking that putting 9 holes in the shutters was going to be a lot of work for Chris. So, he called Chris up to see how he was coming with his project. Chris told him that he'd located the piano hinges and would be ordering the plates the next day. Chris also pointed out that it was going to be a lot larger project than he'd planned on and would take a while to complete. Gary asked Chris if it would help if he only put 4 plates in each house, one on each exposure. Boy would it, Chris had said, so Gary told him to just plan on 12 plates instead of 27.

No one realized it at the time, but The Three Amigos had just gotten lucky. That gang problem in LA had forced the new Governor to call in the CNG to restore order. And when the Guard showed up, LA erupted into what one can only describe as open warfare. After being nearly wiped out by the Army, the gangs weren't about to let that happen again. Then word of the LA riots, as the media referred to them, hit the evening news and all hell began to break loose around the country. The disturbances started out small enough, to be sure, and the various Governors involved also called out their state Guards. But, not every Guard unit is equipped with Abrams or even Bradley's and the whole thing took about a week to get out of hand. President Santorum was finally forced to federalize guard units from several more states to restore order. And, wouldn't you know it, another one of those massive hurricanes was headed for Florida.

When Chris showed up to start installing the firing ports, Gary suggested that under the circumstances he put the front port in each of the homes first. With the riots in progress in LA, Chris was on hiatus, and he had plenty of time to work on the projects. So, Chris put in the front ports, followed by an end port on Ron and Clarence's homes followed by the rear ports. He worked from sunup until sundown and in 6 days had all 12 firing ports installed. Gary didn't particularly think of this as a freebie and Chris was pretty surprised when Gary handed him a check to cover his materials and labor. You could always tell when Chris was grateful because he said "Tanks".

Whoever was in charge of the Guard units in LA must have had his head stuck where

the sun didn't shine. Either that or those gangsters were smarter than anyone thought. Who knows, maybe they'd been watching reruns of the war in Iraq on the History Channel and got a few ideas from the insurgents. Nah, that wasn't likely. But they were darned effective and the kill ratio was running in the gangs' favor. In other areas of the country, the mass influx of additional guard units was having quite the opposite effect and the gangs were slowly being beaten into submission. Santorum contacted the Governor of the state of California, but his offer of additional troops was politely refused. Santorum told the Governor that if the CNG didn't get a handle on the situation quickly, he'd nationalize them and send in Guard units from other states to restore order.

The new Governor, a Democrat, didn't much care for Santorum and his domestic agenda. And he figured that if he let the President send in additional troops it would reflect badly on how he was doing the job. And then Santorum had threatened him and that had really po'd him. He called for the Commander of the CNG to make his presence known in the office immediately. The Adjutant General, Major General Eres was appointed as the 43rd Adjutant General of California by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger on March 4, 2004. As the Adjutant General, he served as Director of the State of California's Military Department and leads the largest, most tasked National Guard force in the United States, with an authorized strength of 18,000 Army National Guard and 4,900 Air National Guard members. General Eres began his military career in the California Army National Guard in 1965 as an enlisted infantryman. He received his commission in 1970 through the California Military Academy. Major General Eres currently had about 40 years of military service.

The Three Amigos Part III – The Three Amigos Ride Again – Chapter 46 – Heat Wave 2

Eres didn't care for the Governor's style. At best, he considered the Governor to be arrogant and at worst incompetent. But, he showed up only to get an ass reaming that would have made a drill instructor proud. The Governor gave him exactly 48 hours to have 'that nasty little mess in LA' resolved. Obviously, the new Governor had never heard of Dale Carnegie. Eres tasked his Assistant to fly to LA and assess the situation. About 4 hours later, the Assistant was on the phone. The problem, he said, was that the gangsters were fighting about like those Iraqi insurgents had back in 2004. The Guard wasn't particularly doing anything wrong, but if Eres wanted to activate more troops, they'd probably be able to get a handle on the situation a lot quicker.

Eres went ahead and issued the orders activating the remaining Guard units. He then phoned the Governor's office and told the Governor what the assessment of the LA situation was and what he was doing about it. The Governor wanted to know if Eres had also activated the Air Guard units. Eres told him no, he didn't think that fighter aircraft were called for in a city like Los Angeles. Man, did that set the Governor off and after a tirade of about 2-3 minutes he hung up on Eres. Eres had about 40 years in and he'd never been abused like this during his entire career. He pulled out a sheet of letterhead and hand wrote his resignation. It seemed clear to him that the Governor was looking for a fall guy and it wasn't going to be him. He picked up the phone and called the Governor's Secretary asking for an immediate appointment to see the Governor.

The Governor's Secretary said that if it were urgent, she could work him in about 2 hours later, but only for 5-10 minutes. Eres accepted the appointment and assured her that 5 minutes would be more than adequate. Eres then contacted his Assistant, Brigadier John R. Alexander and gave him a heads up. He went on to tell Alexander that he'd activated everyone but the Air Guard and shared a bit of the Governor's tirade with Alexander so that Alexander would know what he was up against. Alexander had 2 more years of military service than Eres and they had one thing in common, they were Mustangs. Alexander thought about it for a while and hand wrote his resignation, too and faxed it to Eres. Eres received the fax shortly before he left for the Governor's office. He looked at it and grinned, obviously Alexander wasn't willing to put up with the Governor's BS either.

When he was shown into the Governor's office, Eres walked up to the desk and stood at attention. When finally the Governor's looked up at him, Eres handed the Governor the two resignations.

"What's this?" the Governor asked.

"Those are the resignations of my Assistant and myself Mr. Governor," Eres said. "Since you seem to know so much about how to run the Guard, we're stepping down to give you free reign." With that, the General turned on his heel and left the Governor's office.

It probably took all of an hour for news of the resignations to reach the White House. And, when he got the news, Santorum was furious. He issued orders federalizing the California, Arizona, Nevada and Oregon National Guards and ordered that all infantry units be sent to Los Angeles to quell the unrest. He then directed that his secretary inform the Governor of California of his action while he called the Governors of the other three states.

National Guard units can't mobilize in minutes and hours would be fairly quick. CNN picked up on what was happening and put it on the air. One of the gang members was flipping channels on a new TV he'd looted from an electronics store and he happened to pass CNN at just the right moment. In a matter of minutes the news that the President was sending in a whole lot of National Guard troops was buzzing among gang members. Some of them were going to stand and fight, but a small, non-vocal group began to make other plans. They weren't about to get their butts shot off in a lost cause.

They grabbed a couple of cars, filled them with gas and jumped on the southbound Harbor freeway. They took the 110 to the 91 and headed east where, eventually, they picked up the 15 and headed north. All of which was possible because the on-scene Guard Commander hadn't thought it necessary to guard the 110 south. When the two carloads of gangsters got to 138, they took it, intending to cut across on 138 and pick up I-5 in Gorman so they could get to San Francisco. Say, did I tell you where Gary had bought the 2½ acres? It was on Pearblossom Highway between Pearblossom and Litterock. Pearblossom Highway has a number, state route 138.

What was it Rick had said in Casablanca? "Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, she walks into mine." Those three houses were at least 3 miles from the next nearest house. KCBS's helicopter happened to pick up the cars fleeing down the 110 and broadcast a live camera shot. But, after the cars turned east on 91, the chopper had to return to the airport and refuel. And, an LA County Sheriff's helicopter tried to pick up the fleeing cars, but couldn't find them in the traffic on 91. CNN rebroadcast the brief live feed from KCBS and Ron was resting, watching TV. He was on the phone in moments warning Gary and Clarence that a couple of carloads of gangsters had broken out of LA. Now Gary and Clarence figured that the odds of those 2 carloads of gangster ending up on their doorstep were about a million to one, and probably less. But what the hell, they decided to button up anyway, just in case. Clarence went outside and closed his shutters while Lucy locked the bars in place. Gary and Sharon did the same thing. Then, the two of them headed to Ron's to help him button up. In short order, the three amigos were perched on kitchen chairs with the snouts of their .50 BMG rifles poking out the front gun ports.

By this time, the LA County Sheriff and the San Bernardino County Sheriff had all of their choppers in the air looking for the fleeing cars, but weren't having much luck. Depending on traveling conditions and such, the trip from the Harbor Freeway to Palmdale takes from 1½ to 2 hours. Those punks sure didn't do a very good job of stealing cars either. About ½ - ¾ of a mile before they got to those three homes, one of the cars had a blowout. They slid to a stop just within view of the three houses. They looked in the

trunk and the spare was flatter than a pancake. The spare to the 2nd car was fine, but the wheel was wrong, so they couldn't use it.

Overhead, out of their hearing, an LA Country Sheriff's chopper spotted the two cars and radioed Palmdale requesting patrol cars. The punks, unaware that they had been spotted, decided to walk down to the houses and see if maybe they could steal a new car and be on their way. Clarence was the first to spot the punks and he keyed his mike and announced that there was a bunch of guys headed their way from the east. Ron and Gary got on the radios and suggested that they hold fire and see if those guys passed them by. The Three Amigos had taken their rifles to the range the day after they picked up Clarence's because installing a suppressor invariably changes the aim of the rifle. They had them sighted in for about 300-yards when Ron got tired and they had to call it a day. They hadn't had a chance to get back to the range. But it was only about 100-yards to the Pearblossom Highway, so they figured they were in pretty good shape.

There were 11 of the gangsters, punks or whatever you want to call them. They walked up to the front gate of the property and found the gate locked with a chain and padlock. Of course, they all had a master key of one form or another. Some were 9mm and a couple were .45's. Even so, it took 2 shots to bust that lock. And, that was all The Three Amigos needed as an excuse. The suppressed .50 BMG rifle makes a sound about equivalent to an unsuppressed M1A. There were three bangs and 3 of the gangsters went flying from the impact of the .50 BMG bullets. The other 8 didn't see where the shots came from and barely heard the shots, but they saw their friends flying and hit the dirt. They began returning fire at the homes, but no one fired back. And it seemed to them as if their bullets were just bouncing off.

Overhead, the Sheriff's chopper was watching the action down below. The observer in the chopper knew who lived in those homes and he got back on the radio and reported that the 3 old geezers from Moon Shadows were taking fire in their new homes. He also reported that 3 of the gang bangers were down, probably for good. Normally in the AV patrol cars carry one Deputy. However, since this was a tactical alert, each of the three cars speeding towards the scene carried four Deputies. They had to slow a bit for Little Rock and then came rushing on. Meanwhile, Gary, Ron and Clarence were holding their fire. They couldn't really find a good target and decided to wait until the guys out by the road rushed them. About that time they began to hear the sirens in the distance. They had a quick radio conversation and put the .50s away opting to switch to their M1A's. There was no sense in inviting trouble.

Those punks obviously heard the sirens, too because they began to scatter. The patrol cars pulled to a halt and the Bear in the air directed the Deputies to the spots where the punks had taken refuge. Over the course of the next 20 minutes or so, the Deputies managed to round up all of the punks and had them sitting on the ground next to the patrol cars in handcuffs. Meanwhile The Three Amigos had opened the shutters on their front doors and were gathered in front of Gary's house holding their rifles. One of the Deputies examined the 3 bodies and walked their way.

"You three old farts hold your fire," Johnny said.

"They dead?" Clarence asked.

"Not many people walk away from being shot by a .50 BMG rifle," Johnny said.

"Hell we were using these M1A's with hollow points," Gary said.

"You don't need to lie to me Gary," Johnny said, "I could care less what you shot them with, they did shoot the lock off that gate and fire on your homes, right?"

Gary got a stricken look on his face and turned to look at his home. That vinyl siding that Sharon had insisted upon was pocked with bullet holes. He turned back to Johnny.

"Yeah and that darned vinyl siding took a beating too," he replied.

"Are those steel shutters on the windows?" Johnny asked.

"¾" hot rolled steel plate and the walls are 1' thick reinforced concrete," Gary proudly announced.

"Then you folks weren't really in any danger were you," Johnny observed.

"Of course we were Johnny, one of those gangsters bullets could have come through one of our firing ports." Gary explained.

"So you were in danger then," Johnny said.

"Well of course we were," Ron said.

"Besides," Clarence added, "They fired first."

"The three of you ought to take that act on the road," Johnny laughed. "Ok, we'll write it up as justified homicide and run it by the DA. It's just a good thing for you that those .50 BMG bullets passed right through the bodies, we probably won't be able to prove that you didn't use those M1A's."

"By the way Ron, did you know that Kevin was released last week?" Johnny asked.

"No, but if you see him, don't tell him where we are, Johnny," Ron said, "The last he knew we had moved to New Mexico."

"Say would you fellas mind giving me a tour of one of your homes?" Johnny asked, "I'm just dying of curiosity to see what you built."

"I'll show you mine Johnny, it's the one with the shelter," Gary offered.

They started on the main floor and moved on to the basement. During the course of showing Johnny around the basement, Gary palmed the Stanley garage door opener and then handed it to Ron.

“And now the shelter, Johnny,” Gary said looking at Ron. Gary clapped his hands 3 times and said “Open Sesame”. Ron pushed the button on the door opener and the wall slowly opened to reveal the stairs.

“You’ve got to be shining me on,” Johnny said.

“We were,” Ron said holding up the garage door opener, “But you should have seen the look on your face.”

They descended the stairs and Gary opened the outer blast door and swung it open. Gary pointed out the generator and the entrance to the tunnels.

“If you go straight, you get to the garage, to the right, Clarence’s and to the left Ron’s,” Gary explained.

“How come you don’t have a blast door on this opening?” Johnny asked.

“Huh. Well, I guess that I forgot,” Gary admitted.

Gary opened the inner blast door to the shelter and they did a quick tour. When they got to the storage room Johnny noticed that there were 3 gun safes and a rack for rifles. All of the rifles had the California legal locking devices. He also noticed several other things, but kept what he saw to himself.

“You three old guys are still technically on the books as inactive Reserve Deputies,” Johnny said. “It might be a good idea for you to put on your Deputies hat’s and take another look at this room.”

Gary’s head snapped in the direction on the cases of grenades and stack of LAW’s.

“I see we need to add another storage cabinet or gun safe,” he said.

“Now that might not be a bad idea,” Johnny chuckled. “If you use a cabinet, be sure it has a lock.”

Gary escorted Johnny back to the main floor and said that Johnny knew where to find them if he needed anything. They needed to wipe down the M1A’s and clean the rifles. And, Gary obviously had a few loose ends to tie up, like getting a storage cabinet for those other munitions. And it just never occurred to him about the blast door, But, he needed to have one of those installed, too. Hell, come to think of it, he couldn’t even remember how big that used tank was that he had put in for diesel fuel; it was

40,000-gallons, wasn't it? Gary went back to the shelter to help Ron and Clarence clean the .50 caliber rifles, but all three rifles were clean and back in the gun safes.

He checked the M1A's and his was sitting there not wiped down and Ron and Clarence's were missing. "Oh, that's right," he thought, "We keep those upstairs, don't we." He grabbed his ALICE gear, the rifle and his silicon gun cloth and went upstairs, locking up as he went. He wiped down the M1A, slipped it into its rack and hung the ALICE gear in the closet. It was time to check his blood sugar and take his blood pressure then medicate for the evening. His BP was normal and his BS was around 140, so Gary took his insulin, pills and headed for bed. He undressed, did his Nebulizer treatment, which took about 15 minutes, and then took off his watch and crawled into bed.

The next morning Gary got up, showered, did his meds and ate breakfast. Then he sat down and made a list of those loose ends he needed to tie up. He got on the phone and ordered another blast door first. He got in his pickup and drove to Staples where he purchased a preassembled office cabinet. He hauled that home and gave Clarence a ring to see if Clarence could help him get it down stairs. Clarence said sure, he'd be glad to help, and he wanted to talk to Gary anyway. Gary went out to the garage to get the appliance cart and returned home waiting for Clarence to come help him unload the truck. Clarence showed up a few minutes later and asked him if he were ok now. Gary said he was fine and they hauled the cabinet to the storeroom and put the LAW rockets and grenades in the cabinet. The two of them walked the cart to the garage and Clarence invited him to come over for coffee so they could visit.

When the coffee was done Clarence poured them both a cup and sat down at the table.

"What happened to you yesterday?" Clarence asked.

"I was about to ask you the same thing, Clarence," Gary replied. "I walked Johnny upstairs and came right back down to the shelter but Ron and you were gone. So I went back upstairs, wiped down my Super Match and put it and my ALICE gear away. Then I took my meds, did a Nebulizer treatment and went to bed. How did the two of you get those rifles clean so quick?"

"Huh. Is that how you remember it Gary?" Clarence asked.

"Yeah. Do you remember it different?" Gary asked.

"Well, Ron and I waited for you for over half an hour," Clarence said. "We figured you must have gotten tied up with Johnny so we went ahead and cleaned the rifles. After that when you still hadn't shown up we came upstairs to check on you. You were sitting in a chair in a trance. We talked to you, shook you and simply couldn't get your attention. Man, you were in Never-never-land. We told Sharon to keep an eye on you and went home. She called about 2 hours later and said that you'd gone down to the shelter, gotten your ALICE gear and rifle and locked up the shelter on your way back upstairs. Then, apparently, you sat down in that chair again and went back into the trance. About

two hours after that, she called to say that you did your meds, did the Nebulizer thing and went to bed. And somewhere in between the meds and going to bed, you went out again. You ever have an experience like that before?"

"I kept looking at my watch yesterday afternoon and every time I looked at it, I'd lost another 2 hours, Clarence," Gary replied. "Hell I just thought it was the watch acting up. I've never had anything like that happen before, that I know of anyway."

The Three Amigos Part III – The Three Amigos Ride Again – Chapter 47 – Return to the Citadel

Clarence believed that Gary had never had that the problem before; at least he'd never seem any indication of it. Nonetheless he talked to Ron about it and Ron said that they somehow needed to get Gary talked in to going to the Citadel and checked out. How to accomplish that, Ron said, was an entirely different matter. Gar-Bear might be the sole member of the board at the Citadel, but getting him to go in for a physical would probably be impossible. You folks all believe in God, right? Well, if you don't, you ought to reconsider. Gary received a call from the Foundation that day informing him that Ron and Clarence were back on the Board. The Foundation also informed him that due to their ages, all 3 of the amigos had to have an annual physical and that they expected the results within a week.

"Well, I've got some good news and some bad news," Gary announced. "The good news is that you two crusty old farts are back on the Board. The bad news is that all 3 of us have to go in immediately for a physical."

"OH, REALLY?" Ron said. "Thank you, Jesus," he thought.

"I called and set them up for tomorrow morning," Gary continued, "Is that ok with you guys?"

"Well of course, Gary," Clarence replied. "Thank you, Jesus," he thought.

Ron asked if Gary would excuse him for a moment and he quickly called Sharon. He filled her in and asked if she could call Dr. J and persuade him to be present at the Citadel the next day. Sharon was reluctant, she and J didn't quite have the same friendship that Gary and J enjoyed but when she called the office, the nurse put her right through to Dr. J. Sharon explained to Dr. J what had happened to Gary and that he was scheduled for a physical the next day at the Citadel. She was calling, she said, to see if Dr. J could possibly be there and participate in the physical. Dr. J told her that he was scheduled to be at the Citadel tomorrow anyway, but that even if he'd hadn't, in this instance he would have changed his schedule. What he didn't tell her was that he didn't like the sounds of this business one bit.

Dr. J and Dr. E ran their office on a schedule where they alternated mornings and afternoons. For example, if Dr. E had the duty Monday morning, Dr. J had the duty Monday afternoon. Then on Tuesday, Dr. J had the morning and Dr. E the afternoon. Calling their office and actually getting to speak to a doctor was like flapping your arms and flying. It rarely if ever happened. Back when Gary had that breathing problem that landed him in AV Hospital had been the first time Sharon had ever been put through to the doctor. Anyway, Dr. J was on the phone, talking to his friend Dr. T, the famous neurosurgeon (He really is famous). They were discussing what little J knew from the conversation with Sharon and both doctors agreed that it was likely that old Gar-Bear would need surgery. Dr. T said he'd clear a spot in his schedule, but that he wasn't on staff at the

Citadel so they'd probably have to transport Gary to Northridge for the operation. Dr. J laughed and told Dr. T that by the time he got to Palmdale, he'd not only be on staff, he'd probably be the head of Neurosurgery. Gary, he explained was the Chairman of the board of the Hospital and his 2 best friends made up the remainder of the Board. Besides, J said, you had to see this hospital to believe it. It had absolutely the latest and greatest of everything.

"I don't like the idea of somebody I never doctored with before poking and prodding," Gary said on the way to the Citadel. "If it had been up to me, I'd have gone down to the Valley and gotten the physical from Dr. J."

"Well Gar-Bear," Ron said, "Maybe you'll get lucky and it will be his day to be at the hospital." Ron had talked to Sharon after she'd talked to J.

"Ron the odds of that happening are about like the odds of those 11 gang bangers showing up on our doorstep," Gary grouched.

If Gary knew what was planned for him, he'd no doubt have turned the pickup around and headed home.

The Three Amigos were afforded VIP treatment, that po'd Gary from the get-go. And low and behold, who should walk into the examination room but none other than Dr. J. Gary was glad to see Dr. J, but his mind was racing. Gary had a bit of paranoia and he didn't know whether it was just his good luck or there was a conspiracy going on here. The truth was, it was a bit of both, but that never occurred to Gary. Dr. J gave Gary a thorough going over and then suggested that it might be a good time for an MRI to see how the diabetes was affecting his brain. They'd done that a few years back and the results had been interpreted that Gary had a stroke. But, Gary had never had a stroke and eventually it was decided that the results reflected the effects of his diabetic neuropathy. The bottom line was that Gary never suspected the real reason for the MRI.

As much as I hate saying it, it was like leading a lamb to the slaughter. Dr. J happened to remember Gary talking about his previous experiences with closed MRI's and he ordered that Gary be 'knocked out' so that he didn't wiggle and screw up the results. And unbeknownst to Gary, Sharon had gotten that envelope that Gary kept by his desk with the MRI photos from 1998 and had brought them to the hospital and given them to Dr. J. This was the full spine MRI that had been used to diagnose Gary's spinal stenosis and he kept them around as a souvenir.

Dr. L, Clarence's Neurologist, the Radiologist, Dr. J and the technician were in the MRI control room. Dr. T had suggested most strongly that while they had Gary in the MRI they run a Cervical and Thoracic series on Gary's spine, he wanted to know how far the stenosis had progressed on C-3, C-4 and C-6. The state-of-the-art in 2004 permitted doctors to tell, most of the time, if a tumor was malignant or benign. By 2009, the state-of-the-art had advanced by leaps and bounds and had eliminated 99% of the guess-work.

They'd given Gary a fairly healthy dose of sedative and he was in LA-LA land. They slid him into the MRI and did his brain first. It was like Dr. J had suspected, Gary had a benign tumor in his brain about 1.5cm in diameter. Dr. L said that he could assist in an operation to remove the tumor, but that he didn't have the experience for this particular operation, Dr. J told Dr. L that Gary's regular neurologist was Dr. T and that Dr. T was on standby in case an operation were necessary. That almost spooked Dr. L, Dr. T's reputation was something else. They proceeded to run the Cervical and Thoracic spinal series and old Gar-Bear's spine was pinching off significantly.

They compared the MRI's from 1998 and the current set and Dr. L voiced the opinion that it looked like they were going to have to do some work to decompress C-3, C-4 and C-6 on top of removing the tumor. Meanwhile, they had taken Gary out of the MRI, given him a bit more of the sedative to keep him under, and had taken him to the CCU. One of the advantages of a long-term doctor-patient relationship is that the doctor gets to know the idiosyncrasies of his patient. Dr. J knew that if they let Gary come out of the sedative, he'd be hell on wheels. While Dr. J was on the phone setting up surgery the next morning with Dr. T, Dr. S was in the CCU giving Gary the once over to make certain he could handle the surgery without difficulty. Dr. S was very happy that Dr. J had kept Gary sedated, he still remembered the trouble they'd had with old Gar-Bear, as his friends called him, back in AV Hospital. Mr. Olsen wasn't exactly the best of patients and he didn't seem to care for hospitals very much.

Dr. J had given Dr. T directions to the Citadel and had filled him in. Dr. L, the Chief of Neurology had observed the MRI's and had expressed the opinion that Olsen needed his spine decompressed as well. Then, Dr. J called his wife, a fine nurse from Ireland, and told her that he was staying over for Olsen's surgery.

I should point out that when it came to getting medical treatment Gary Olsen had phenomenal luck. Back in 1990, he'd needed his gall bladder removed. This was in the glory days of Grenada Hills Hospital. One Dr. R had recently begun doing Laparoscopic Cholecystectomies. (Surgical removal of the gall bladder using endoscopes and little incisions.) Well now, in 1990, that was a radical procedure in LA and Dr. R was the Chief of Surgery at Grenada Hills Hospital. A colleague, the head of surgery at another hospital had volunteered to assist so that he could learn the procedure. In fact, several doctors planned to observe the operation. As it happened, the weekend before the surgery was scheduled, Gary had ended up in Grenada Hills Hospital with an attack of Pancreatitis. I don't know if I've ever told that episode in any of my stories, but if I haven't and you're interested, it's quite the story.

Anyway, Gary hadn't had the Laparoscopic procedure because of the inflamed Pancreas, which was just as well, because they'd have had to 'convert' to the standard procedure anyway. It seemed that Gary's blood vessels in and around his liver and pancreas were all screwed up. But, while they were sewing him up, Gary started throwing PVC's (Pre-Ventricular Contractions) and that was when he'd met Dr. P, his cardiologist. Gary's electrolytes were screwed up, probably because he was still drinking in those

days and a dose of magnesium fixed him right up. And, it also established Gary's long record of having problems with nurses and hospitals. They had Gary on one of those machines where you could dispense a little dose of painkiller every 10 minutes or so.

The bottle had run dry and the nurses had put in a new bottle of Demerol. No big deal, except they charged \$250 a bottle for the Demerol. Well now, this one nurse had been on break and she had never done the bottle switch before. When she got back from her break and found out they'd changed the bottle without her being present, she threw a regular hissy fit. So much so, that the other nurses gave in and allowed her to remove and reinsert the bottle of Demerol. The nurse was a clumsy thing and she'd dropped and broke that bottle of Demerol. And they'd had the nerve to charge old Gar-Bear for the broken bottle of drugs! To top it off, Gary and that nurse were both pretty strong willed people and it had gotten so bad that the Cardiologist had ordered the nurse out of CCU before Gary had a heart attack. (I really don't make all of this stuff up; it's been an interesting life. Fleataxi says I could write a story just recounting my real adventures.)

The next morning, Dr. T arrived at the hospital early, around 7am, and he reviewed the MRI's. Dr. L had it right, that little tumor needed to come out. And C-3, C-4 and C-6 needed the roto-router treatment. They took Gary into surgery and about 3½ hours later, he was as good as new and in the recovery room. They had quite a debate whether to let Gary wake up or not. Once he was awake, he was a real pain in the butt. Medical procedure outweighed common sense in this case and they moved Gary to ICU and let him slowly wake up.

The last thing Gary remembered was getting a shot before he went into the MRI. He woke up and looked around and after a moment recognized that he was in ICU. "Gee," he thought, "I wonder if I had a problem in the MRI?" A nurse came in and after the usual pleasantries suggested that Gary not move around because that was some pretty heavy-duty surgery he'd had. Well, doctors aren't perfect and they'd forgotten to tell that ICU nurse not to mention the surgery. The surgery had gone perfectly and Gary was going to be all right. Unfortunately, Gary didn't know that. He didn't know that his head was wrapped in bandages and that he had an 8" incision along his spine.

And, all of a sudden, Gary was po'd. Hell, his blood pressure shot up setting off the alarm on the monitor and the next thing you knew the nurse was in the room injecting something into his IV. The doctors, it seems, had remembered to write an instruction to sedate Gary if he reacted badly to waking up. The next thing Gary knew, some luscious redhead who was built like the proverbial brick outhouse was leaning over him. Apparently Ron had found time to read 'Mountain Man'. The nurse said, "Hi, my name is Jennifer." (In Mountain Man, Jennifer was a doctor) Gary contented himself to just lie there and enjoy the view, if you get my drift. Gary always claimed he was a 'leg-man' but the legs were a bit further down on the body. About that time, Dr. J walked into the room, Gary was no longer in ICU, and he started to explain to Gary what had happened. Now Dr. J always had a calming effect on Gary and having that redheaded nurse in the room didn't hurt one bit. Dr. J had to tell her to leave so he could get Gary's attention. Gary hadn't even noticed that Sharon was in the room. But, Sharon and Gary had been mar-

ried a long time and she was well accustomed to his antics. Odds were she'd been involved in hiring the redheaded nurse in the first place.

The Three Amigos Part III – The Three Amigos Ride Again – Chapter 48 – Return to the Citadel 2

“Gary, you had a small, benign tumor, about 1.5 cm in diameter in your brain,” Dr. J explained. “We also checked your spine and C-3, C-4 and C-6 were pretty severely compressed. Dr. T did the surgery with Dr. L and me assisting. Your prognosis is excellent and you should be out of here tomorrow.”

Ninety-nine times out of 100 a doctor would never talk to a patient like that. Remember what I said about the doctor-patient relationship? It had taken years for Gary to train J to talk to him in plain medical language. Anything he didn't understand he could look up on the net. Well now, Gary understood everything J had said, in this instance, and he didn't have a single question unless it was what that redhead's phone number was. But Gary's bimbo days were long over and he didn't even joke about that. He just contented himself to lay back and enjoy the view. Of course, the second thing old Gar-Bear had checked was the ring finger on her left hand and she had a darned nice wedding ring and diamond. Figured.

Now 'Jennifer's' real name was Barbara. And, before Gary had woken up, Sharon had a visit with her. She half apologized, in advance, and told Barbara that despite Gary claiming for years that he was a legman, he had some sort of a breast fixation. Barbara lamented how she was pretty much used to it by this point in her life and if Gary wanted to be a dirty old man, let him. Didn't they already make this movie and call it 'Conspiracy Theory'?

“Hey you old reprobate,” Ron said entering the room, “It's good to see you awake.”

“Check that out Ronald,” Gary said nodding to 'Stacy'.

“She's married,” Ron said.

“Yeah, I know, but what a sight to wake up to,” Gary chuckled.

“Some people have all the luck,” Clarence chimed in. “How are you feeling?”

“You know fellas, that guardian angel that I have must be getting pretty tired,” Gary replied. “Either that, or I have more dumb luck than the law allows. How are the two of you doing?”

“Well, it's been a long ten days,” Ron replied. “You scared the crap out of me this time.”

“Yeah, Gary,” Clarence added, “Ron and I was trying to figure out how to get you to the Citadel for a checkup and then you came and told us about that annual physical. Man, is God watching out for you.”

“Which one of you is behind hiring the redhead and what is her real name?” Gary

asked.

"I did," Ron admitted, "But Sharon was involved too. And her real name is Barbara."

"I'd bet dollars to donuts that Sharon probably told her I was a dirty old man, too," Gary laughed. "What's going on with the gangs? All of that happened the day before I came in here for that physical?"

"Well," Clarence said, "Apparently the Adjutant General and his assistant resigned from the CNG. Santorum heard about it and nationalized the Guards from California, Arizona, Nevada and Oregon. Before they could mobilize, those 11 gangsters that we ran into bolted and ended up on our front doorstep. By the way, the DA, said it was justifiable homicide. Anyway, once the Guard forces got to LA, they had the whole thing wrapped up in about 3 days. So, I guess everything is pretty much back to normal."

"Wasn't there a major hurricane off the Florida coast?" Gary asked.

"Man, they must have fixed your memory while they were digging around in that brain of yours," Ron answered. "There was, but about 100-miles off the coast, it unexpectedly changed course and dropped from a category 4 to a tropical storm by the time it made landfall further up the Atlantic coast."

Whether or not it had been medically advisable, the hospital had taken Gary off the Foley before waking him up. As a consequence, he was feeling pretty dang good. And, his medical chart revealed that left unhindered by all of his manipulations, he was in excellent condition. His BS and BP were well managed and he was well enough to be discharged. In fact Dr. J, the physician of record, had already written up the discharge orders. And, Dr. J had fixed old Gary up with a goodly supply of Physicians samples. The next morning after breakfast, Sharon showed up with some clothes and Gary was discharged. Life was good and getting better.

Damon and Derek had been to the hospital any number of times to check in on their Dad, but the hospital was keeping Gary sedated at the time. That evening they stopped by the house to see how Gary was doing.

"Dad, haven't I told you that you have to quit doing this sort of stuff?" Derek asked.

"Kid, if it had been up to me, I'd probably be dead," Gary laughed.

Gary was a little tired from the hospital stay and the boys only stayed a few minutes. Sharon told Gary that supper would be ready in about 30 minutes, so he did his evening BP/BS routine and took his meds. They had a light supper and Gary settled in to watch a little TV. Naturally, he put the TV on CNN to see what was going on in the world. It was the tail end of Larry King live and Gary wasn't interested so he started channel hopping. The next thing you knew, he was back to CNN having found nothing of interest. He turned the TV off and picked up his cane and walked to the closet. Well, his

M1A was where he thought it should be, so he remembered that right. Normally, Gary didn't use a cane, anymore, but he was a bit on the weak side and had decided not to take any chances.

"I've probably got a mailbox full," he thought, "Guess I'd better go clean it out."

Once, in a weak moment, Gary had checked on one of those Canadian Pharmacies on the web. Ever since he'd done that, he'd been receiving about 50 pieces of junk mail a day, including ads from porn sites. There was supposed to be a law against this stuff, but apparently those websites weren't much interested in following the law. Gary had to reboot the computer and then he brought up SBC. He just wasn't up to dealing with 400+ pieces of mail and shut down the Internet. He couldn't put his finger on it, but he had that sinking feeling again in his gut. He sloughed it off, did a Nebulizer treatment and went to bed.

Washington...

When Santorum had been elected President he picked a real humdinger for a Secretary of DHS. Most people had never heard of the guy, but he really had his act together. The guy's name was Prescott. Santorum had kept Mueller and Goss on board and together the 3 men had made substantial inroads into improving the security of the US. For one thing, inspections of cargos entering the US were now being inspected at nearly the rate of 50% rather than the 2% as had been the past practice. The inspections were conducted in the ports of origin of the cargos. Santorum had realized that the US Immigration policies needed an overhauling and together with Congress had come up with some reasonable, legitimate laws that recognized that the US depended upon immigrant labor for its agricultural needs. Not that everyone agreed with the new law, but it was realistic, if nothing else.

Indonesia had failed to capture Hambali after the attacks on the US dams and pipelines and he was still running around planning yet another attack on the US. Unfortunately, the improved US security was interfering with his plans. He'd lost his American cell in that shootout in Burbank and hadn't been able to fully replace them. He'd only managed to get 3 men into the US before the security tightened up and he really wanted a 4-man cell. And, it wasn't like Indonesia wasn't trying its very best to locate the terrorist. It had gotten to the point that the UN Security Council was discussing human rights violations in Indonesia. Interestingly, Indonesia had a major ally in the UN, the US, and the Security Council wasn't getting anywhere.

Hambali decided to make what I suppose you'd call a full-court press. He was going to flood several points of entry into the US with operatives in the hopes that at least one of them got through. He had spent a lot of money getting together especially good sets of forged papers and the operation was already underway. Forged, in this instance, was perhaps a misnomer. The documents were in fact stolen genuine French documents that had been carefully altered by a master craftsman. As part of its routine admissions procedures, the US scanned foreign passports. But a system was only as good as the

information one put into it and the French government wasn't cooperating with the US. As a result, 5 of the 6 men who attempted entry into the US made it past inspection. The sixth man's papers worked too, but he somehow didn't pass muster and was refused entry. All of a sudden, Hambali had not 1, but 2 fully operational cells within the US.

The Indonesian terrorists had been well schooled and as had the previous cell, they went to ground. They realized from following CNN that the American ATF had really been doing a job on hammering explosives distributors who failed to maintain adequate security. That was ok, they had a full container of explosives on a ship headed for the US. The container of explosives was labeled to be just what it was, explosives. The only thing wrong with the whole thing was that the company that the explosives were destined for didn't know that they were receiving a container of explosives. That way, when the terrorists stole the shipment in route, no one would be the wiser. Well, the driver would be, but he was going to disappear, now wasn't he? Hambali had been very careful to hire an independent trucker to haul the load. A background check on the trucker had revealed that he was a single man with no apparent next of kin or even a steady girlfriend for that matter. It might be some time before he was even missed.

Palmdale...

Gary was out of the hospital a week now and he was feeling pretty darn good. Once he got those sutures out, he figured he would feel even better. As fast as he healed it didn't make much sense to him to keep the stitches in as long as the doctor wanted, but he wasn't about to raise hell with someone who'd save his life. The thing was, that that gnawing sensation he had in his gut was slowly getting worse. At first, he thought maybe his stomach was bothering him, so he'd taken a course of treatment with the Prevacid he had left over from before. But, that hadn't changed anything and he'd discontinued the treatment, realizing that it was just his warning alarm going off, one more time.

"Dang Ron," Gary said, "I don't like this one bit. I've got that old sinking feeling in my gut again and you know what that means."

"You need to stop that Gar-Bear," Ron said. "Hell; you're barely healed up from the hospital. You aren't even back to fighting trim, yet."

"Clarence did you check out the possibility of putting scabbards on those golf carts for the big rifles?" Gary asked. "I sort of half promised that guy that I'd look into it."

"Ain't no way in hell we're going to make that work, Gary," Clarence replied. "What I did was put in a couple of uprights and hang one of those pickup rifle racks to hold the guns. Man between those Winchesters, the M16A3/M203, the M1A and now the 50s any dangd fool who comes up against us had better get in the first shot."

"Watch it Clarence," Ron said, "Remember about God and his sense of humor."

“Oh, that’s right, Ron, thanks,” Clarence said. “God, if you’re listening I wasn’t serious there.”

“How are they coming on getting those dams rebuilt?” Gary asked.

“Hoover and Parker are coming along nicely, ahead of schedule,” Ron replied.

“Good,” Gary said. “Say isn’t it about time we started a recall on that dope they have in Sacramento?”

“We can’t do that, Gary,” Ron chuckled, “Arnold is making a new movie and isn’t available. Besides, I think they have term limits or something.”

“Yeah and Charlton Heston has Alzheimer’s,” Clarence added.

“Well, what about Steven Seagal?” Gary asked. “He hasn’t made a good movie in years.”

“Nah,” Ron said, “I could never vote for anyone dumb enough to divorce Kelly LeBrock. Did you see her in ‘Weird Science’?”

“It’s on my top ten list Ronald,” Gary laughed.

“I thought you was a leg man,” Clarence said.

“How many times do I have to tell you Clarence?” Ron retorted, “The legs don’t start 8” below the chin.”

I-80, Pennsylvania...

The trucker had just finished eating and making a stop at the john. He headed back to his truck. He checked the tires and was about to get in when he felt what he took to be a gun barrel in the small of his back. A moment later, he felt nothing at all as the 9mm slugs ripped into his spine. The two terrorists took the man’s keys and loaded the body into the sleeper of the semi as quickly as possible. The driver had left the tractor running for some strange reason. These Americans were so wasteful! They continued the trip as before, however when they got to the Ohio turnoff for the original destination, they bypassed it and continued on their way. Their first stop was a barn on a deserted farm somewhere in Indiana. There, they planned to alter the numbers on the trailer. After the trailer was disguised, they were going to pull it to a location where several companies had cargo containers that they used as storage. They had rented a space under an assumed name at Hambali’s direction and no one would think to look twice at the trailer. After, they planned to dump the tractor back in eastern Ohio, along I-80 pointed west-bound.

The terrorists had screwed up again. They didn't know it and it would take quite some time to surface, but that trucker had met a gal at a truck stop and they had gotten on quite well. He'd ended up moving in with her about a month before he'd picked up that load of explosives. Most of the time he called her daily except when he got really busy. He'd called her from the truck stop shortly before his untimely demise and had told her it would be a few days before he called again. He also mentioned that he was hauling a load of explosives for a firm in Ohio, but she didn't catch the name.

A week later, Marie (the girlfriend) was getting pretty alarmed. She hadn't heard from Rob (the trucker) in a week and he'd told her that he'd only be out of touch for about 3 days. Finally Marie went to the police and filed a missing person report. The police usually take these to be a routine matter, but when Marie happened to mention that Rob was hauling a load of explosives, all hell broke loose. They immediately notified the ATF that they possibly had a missing truck driver who was hauling a load of explosives. And, while the ATF was in route, the police began to question Marie, trying to elicit every possible piece of information they could about Rob.

The Three Amigos Part III – The Three Amigos Ride Again – Chapter 49 – Manhunt

Don't believe what you see in the movies or on TV. The police can be pretty efficient at times and this was one of those times. By the time the ATF showed up at the police station, a seasoned detective had coaxed about everything they needed from Marie. The ATF agent took the information and got on the line to the New York office. He passed along the information and the ATF put the wheels into motion. It didn't take them all that long to come up with a copy of the bill of lading for that shipment of explosives. But, when they contacted the company who was the supposed recipient of the shipment, they knew nothing about it. This information was passed immediately to the director of the ATF, Truscott, and he was on the phone to Secretary Prescott at DHS in minutes. Prescott called Santorum and gave him a quick overview of the situation. Santorum suggested that Prescott immediately form a taskforce to deal with the matter and he'd take care of the paperwork. The same group as last time, Santorum suggested and outlined what needed to be done.

A high priority APB/BOLO was put out to be on the lookout for Rob's tractor, trailer and Rob. The bulletin was most specific that Rob wasn't wanted for anything and was considered as 'missing'. About twenty minutes earlier, an Ohio state trooper had ticketed Rob's tractor. When he heard the broadcast, he immediately did a U-turn and headed back to the tractor, code 3. As he drove, he passed along the information to the dispatcher and asked for backup. The trooper arrived at the tractor just moments before his backup. He hadn't noticed anything particularly out of the order when he'd ticketed the vehicle earlier, but this was a whole new ballgame. With pistol drawn, the trooper approached the cab of the vehicle much more cautiously this time. He tried the handle, but the door was locked, something he hadn't checked the first time. He holstered his pistol and climbed up to look in the window. It wasn't until he got out his flashlight that he noticed what appeared to be bloodstains on one edge of the seat.

The trooper got back on the radio to the dispatcher and filled her in. She advised him to preserve the scene, that the FBI had a crime lab on the way. About an hour later, the trooper began to wonder if that FBI crime lab was coming from Timbuktu. Timbuktu, in case you don't know, is in Mali (west Africa). Apparently the FBI had a crime lab in Pittsburg and it arrived shortly thereafter. The trooper was already on overtime and he radioed the new dispatcher that the FBI was on-scene and asked to be relieved. He got a "Standby one" and was essentially put on hold. A few minutes later the dispatcher came back on and advised him that he was free to leave as soon as his replacement arrived. The twenty minutes it took the replacement to arrive was an eternity, but eventually the trooper was on his way.

The FBI specialists started on the outside and worked their way in. It wasn't until about the time that the trooper left that they'd unlocked the tractor and entered. The trooper had been right; the stain on the right side of the seat was blood. And, there was a lot more of it in the sleeper compartment. They ran a quick blood type test and confirmed that the blood probably belong to Rob, the driver of the truck. One of the agents took

time to pass this information up to Washington.

Washington...

Prescott, Truscott, Goss and Mueller were gathered in a conference room at DHS. When they received word that the on-scene people had a tentative blood match, they knew they were in trouble. An ATF agent had already been to the alleged recipient of the explosives shipment and the company didn't use explosives. Someone had found a chink in their armor.

"You know, I wouldn't be one bit surprised if this wasn't some more of Hambali's work," Mueller remarked.

"Let me check with my people and see if they've heard anything," Goss replied. "We finally have some HumInt assets in Indonesia."

"What are we up against here?" Prescott asked.

"Well, according to this bill of lading," Truscott said, "We've got a pretty big problem. It was a mixed load of explosives and included quite a mix. About the only thing those people don't have is timers and detonators. I'll tell you one thing; this is a new one on me. I think that Bob is right, Hambali's stamp is all over this thing."

Prescott excused himself to go to the office and call Santorum.

"Mr. President," he said, "We found the tractor in eastern Ohio. There were bloodstains consistent with the driver's blood type, but there's no sign of the driver. Mueller thinks that this is the work of Hambali and Truscott agrees with him. Goss is checking their HumInt sources in Indonesia."

"I've worked with those boys before John," the President replied. "If they think it is Hambali, I'd be inclined to go along with them. If I were you, I'd start thinking about bumping up the threat level."

"Yes Sir," Prescott replied, "I'll take that under advisement."

Prescott returned to the conference room and told the others that Santorum had recommended thinking about bumping up the threat level. They talked it over for a bit and agreed that the President was perhaps a bit premature. However they were at blue and it wouldn't hurt all that much to bump it up to yellow. So, Prescott ordered the level bumped to yellow and called a press conference to make the announcement.

Palmdale...

"Ron Green," Ron answered the phone.

"I told you," Gary said.

"What are you talking about Gar-Bear?" Ron asked.

"DHS just bumped the threat level to yellow," Gary replied.

"You know if you'd quit getting those feelings like that, the whole flippin' country would be better off," Ron chuckled. "What is it this time?"

"I only caught part of the broadcast Ron, but apparently they have a missing 40' container load of explosives and I believe I heard Indonesia mentioned," Gary replied.

"You pal Fleataxi was right," Ron said, "They should have nuked Indonesia."

"For crying out loud Ron," Gary said, "That would be like nuking New York to kill a rat. I'm sorry, but you and my friend Fleataxi have nukes on the brain. Now if it were France, I'd probably go along with you."

"When do you get those stitches out?" Ron asked.

"I wasn't supposed to get them out for another couple of days, but the way they itch, I think they can come out now," Gary replied. "At least I'm headed for the Citadel and am going to do my best to get them out. I'll talk to you later."

As it happened, Dr. L was at the hospital and after much cajoling, he agreed that the sutures could come out. It seemed that despite being a diabetic, Olsen healed awfully dang fast. Relieved of his sutures Gary headed home. Dr. L had told him to take it easy for a couple of days and he intended to do just that, for a couple of hours. It was like he'd told Dr. S. All doctors' instructions were medical advice and it was up to him to decide whether or not to take the advice. Dr. L figured that Olsen would ignore him and it really didn't matter, the incisions were fully healed. Still, he had felt obligated to at least give the usual warning to Olsen, just in case.

The terrorist cell had buried Rob's body on the farm in Indiana and had dropped off the container at the container facility. They'd dropped the tractor a full hour before that Ohio trooper had happened on it and they had gone to ground. Both cells had keys for the lock on the trailer and were free to operate independently. One of the groups was in New York City and the other in Dearborn, Michigan, not more than 3 blocks from where the previous cell had been holed up. Apparently Hambali figured that the Americans would never think to look in Dearborn.

When he got home, Gary got his golf cart and mounted a steel pole on it with a yellow flag attached. Then he went home and started to load up the golf cart like WW III was about to go down. He put his ALICE gear for both rifles on the bottom hooks of those rifle racks Clarence had mounted and the Tac-50 in the middle row. The Winchester went into the scabbard and the other two rifles also went on the rifle rack. Gary loaded 2

magazines for the Tac-50 with Raufoss and wrapped a piece of red tape around them. He put match ammo in 3 more magazines. Since the Kimber was in a holster on the ALICE gear, Gar-Bear strapped on the Vaquero. He mounted up on the golf cart and headed for Ron's. When he got there, he let out a blast of air from that air horn he always carried. Ron bolted out of the door, took one look and started to laugh.

"What's so funny?" Gary asked.

"If I have to explain, you wouldn't understand," Ron replied the tears rolling down his cheeks.

"I was just checking things out Ronald," Gary said. "This is the first opportunity I've had to do that. Anyway, what do you think of my flag?"

"What's it for?" Ron asked.

"Ah. I can't remember, but it sure seemed like a good idea at the time," Gary admitted. "Oh, I know, it's the threat level."

"What difference does the threat level make to us?" Ron asked.

"Ok," Gary said, "If you don't like it, I'll take it off." Gary fired up the golf cart, and took off the flag before he forgot why he'd gone to the garage and headed for Clarence's where he let loose with another blast from his air horn. Clarence came out of the door like the house was on fire and just stood there and stared.

"Before you ask, Clarence," Gary said, "I just wanted you to see how nicely that rifle rack of yours worked out."

"Why thank you Gary," Clarence said suppressing his grin, "That was mighty considerate of you."

"See you later," Gary said and headed for home. He unloaded all of the weapons, put them away and returned the golf cart to the garage. "That," he thought, "Ought to keep them guessing for a while."

Clarence called up Ron. "Ron was Gary over to your house?" Clarence asked.

"Hell yes, partner, he was all decked out like WW III was about to start," Ron said, "He even had a flag on that golf cart of his."

"Well, he didn't have no flag when he showed up to my place," Clarence said. "He claimed that he was here to show me how well the rifle rack worked."

"Knowing Gary's sense of humor," Ron said, "I suspect he was just shining us on. But I suppose we'll have to keep an eye on him for a couple of days. I wouldn't worry about it

partner, we'll know one way or the other in a couple of days."

"Well ok," Clarence said, "But until we figure it out, I'm planning on sleeping with my eyes open."

"Now I know he was shining us on, Clarence," Ron laughed. "I'll bet \$50 dollars Gar-Bear is sitting in his recliner thinking that his little stunt will keep us guessing for a while."

"Really?" Clarence said. "I'll take that bet."

"All right, I'll meet you at Gary's in 5 minutes and bring your wallet," Ron laughed.

The 2 amigos rang Gary's doorbell. Sharon answered and there he sat in his recliner.

"Gary if I asked you a question, would you tell me the truth?" Ron asked.

"Unless I lied to you, sure," Gary smiled.

"What were you just thinking?" Ron asked.

"That my little stunt would keep you guessing for a while," Gary replied. "Didn't work huh?"

Ron held out his palm and Clarence counted out \$50.

"Gary, that \$50 is coming out of your hide," Clarence laughed.

"I must be losing my touch fellas, I'd have bet it would have taken you another day or two to figure out you were being had."

"Yeah," Ron said, "But you've been sick, remember?"

"No, what did I have," Gary kidded.

"I'm not sure Gar-Bear," Ron said, "But I can sure tell you what you're going to have if you don't knock it off."

"What's that, partner?" Gary asked.

"A fat lip," Ron chuckled.

"Jeez, I'm sorry fellas I was just trying to let you know I was back to my old self," Gary replied.

"You still owe me \$50," Clarence said.

“Here,” Ron said handing the \$50 back, “I sort of took unfair advantage of you Clarence.”

“What do you mean?” Clarence asked.

“Well, I noticed that Gary had red tape on two of those magazines,” Ron explained. “That’s when I knew he was just pulling something. What did you have in those mags, Gar-Bear?”

“You guys aren’t any fun anymore,” Gary acknowledged. “Two mags of Raufoss and three with Hornady A-MAX.”

“Actually that was a good idea Gary,” Ron admitted. “Clarence, get some red tape from Gary and wrap 2 of your mags with red tape and I’ll wrap one of mine. Only load Mk 211 in those mags.”

“Where do I get that?” Clarence asked.

“Hang on a minute guys and I’ll get you two 20 rounds,” Gary announced.

5 minutes later Gary was back with 20-rounds of Raufoss and the roll of red tape. Clarence got up and went to his house to get 2 of the 5-round Tac-50 magazines. He taped the magazines and returned the tape. Ron got up, went home and got 1 of his mags and did the same thing. They visited a while and Ron and Clarence left. Gary was a little disappointed; he had figured it would take old Ronald McDonald at least a day to catch on. Either he was losing his touch or Ron knew him better than he thought. As with most things the truth lay somewhere in between. Gary’s failure to conceal the red tape had given Ron a clue and Ron actually knew Gary a whole lot better than Gary knew Ron.